

The Missing Night Fury

by haganeochibi

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Summary: "Where did you come from?" "The Isle of Night." "But that's just a story!" Within a rumor, there is a grain of truth. When Hiccup finds a lead on other Night Furies, he also learns that discovering the truth has more consequences than he and Toothless are prepared to handle.

1. Chapter 1 - This is Berk

****Author's Note:**** In this alternate universe, Hiccup and Toothless will clash with friends and foes, the known and unknown. OC's, frontiers, battles, alliances and adventure, this fic has. Enjoy!

****DISCLAIMER:**** I have enough to get by, and what I own does not include HTTYD and all its facets.

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><p>This is Berk. It's got all the ordinary stuff a Viking village has; long houses, a great hall, big beefy people tending to fishing, livestock, agriculture, trade, and more recently, a training academy. That's something where the village of Berk has an edge on the extraordinary. Other villages train people to kill dragons, but here, we educate people to train with dragons. See, we've made peace with the dragons and have had a series of topsy turvy adventures because of it. I've been through the ordinary dragon taming, animal workshop, competing at the Thawfest games, and even your typical kidnapping, courtesy of my favorite Outcast, of course. One time a refugee-spy washed up on our shores, but she ended up siding with us. Then there was that one time when 'they' showed up in our patch of the sky.

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This is bad. This is very bad.

Elene and I got separated when we flew with our dragons into a storm. Scatty managed to crash land into a mountain cave, where we're going to sit out the storm. We've already set up camp for the night, and Scatty's inhaling the fish that I had in my pack. Sounds like fun, except that I don't know where we are, and I'd lost track of Elene and Khor. Anyway, I hope the storm ends soon. When it does, I'm going to look for my twin, and go back home. Mum and dad must be worried. I wonder how they're doing now.

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The sun hadn't even risen properly when Hiccup awoke to a series of impatient thundering noises coming from the roof.

A year ago, he would have liked to sleep in, and wake up with the other Hooligans to start their share of village work. His father would greet him with a scowl over breakfast in the great hall, and the other vikings would have ignored him altogether, if they didn't have another topic to gossip about. Today, his father would have a cheery 'mornin' son!' and walk with him to the great hall for breakfast. The other residents also would send a merry 'hello' his way, and that was a good enough start to get him going throughout the day at the academy or whatever misadventure he found himself into.

But before all those lovely Viking village activities, there was someone who demanded his full attention. And that someone was a large, streamlined scaly reptile who made friends with Hiccup when the others saw him as the worst Viking Berk has ever seen.

Hiccup pulled the blanket over his head and closed his eyes. Maybe he could still get a few minutesâ€|

It was always time to stop trying to sleep when the roars began.

"All right, I'm coming!" A yawning Hiccup swung his legs, flesh, wood, metal and all, off the bed then darted out of the house where Toothless was waiting for him.

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Today however, Toothless was not the first living creature Hiccup saw. He found his father upon Thornado when he stepped outside, and was greeted with a glum "mornin' son," especially when it was compared to eager nose butt that came from Toothless.

"Going somewhere, dad?"

Stoick had his pack on his shoulders, and Hiccup guessed the pack contained provisions that would last for several days.

"Negotiations again," the chief answered shortly. The grim expression he wore especially for negotiations looked even, well, grimmer. Berk had made peace with the dragons, but the price of that was the suspicions of the neighboring villages that Berk gained a serious advantage when it comes to war. That made treaties harder to

negotiate, and not all chieftains were easy to persuade. Hiccup had to tend to his dad for a day when he returned from the previous negotiation, where Stoick and Thornado narrowly escaped being captured.

"Don't worry, dad, it'll be fine," Hiccup tried to reassure his father, "Just stay calm, and tell them that our dragons are not weapons for war."

"I know. Stay safe and put while I'm away. I'll see you in about a week."

Stoick met his son's eyes for a moment before he and Thornado took off.

Hiccup stood for some time in front of the house, staring at the spot in the horizon where he watched his father disappear. One day he'll be the one flying away from Berk to deal with those inter-village chiefly concerns that kept his dad busy all year. Stoick barely had time for his own son, but that did not stop Hiccup from loving his father.

That also did not stop a Night Fury from nosing his rider impatiently.

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Scatty poked her boy awake before the sun even started to peek behind the dissipating cloudsâ€| and promptly made him mount her back to go flying.

"About time! I thought the storm would never end!" The boy said, stepping outside the cave and grinning at the relatively cloudy sky.

"This island looks weird," the boy remarked, as Scatty took off into the chilly wintry air. The land was refreshingly new to him. A foggy mossy island where the sun shines rarely and Night Furies dominated the land; that was his home. Scatty flew around tall rocky spires surrounded by an equally rock-dotted sea, save for a hidden beach near a harbor. Several ships were docked at the harbor, and a series of wooden structures led the way up the rock face and into a whole bunch of wooden houses. The island was inhabited by people!

Her rider had gasped, and urged Scatty to return to the cover of the dense thriving forest. They landed in a comfortably cool cove that would keep them hidden, and which had a small lake swarming with fish. Scatty had no problem with it, if only her rider would catch her some of those yummy aquatic vertebrates.

The Night Fury crooned at the lake. The rider knew what his dragon was getting at. "Breakfast. Right away, your highness."

With a knife that Scatty allowed her rider to carry, the boy whittled a spear out of a branch which proved to be effective in fishing. Soon, Scatty was happily devouring her breakfast. While her rider waited for his fish to cook over a fire, he scaled the rock face leading to the rest of the forest to check if the coast was clear.

The boy reached upward and his hand touched something hard and smooth. Like dry metallic leather, if that even made sense. He hooked an arm on an exposed tree root and lifted his body to see better. And the shiny thing startled him. It made him jump; not a good idea when you're twenty feet above the ground.

The boy gasped; the dragon roared.

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Hiccup and Toothless were supposed to work out their latest trick. Yesterday, Hiccup nearly drowned. But that didn't stop the duo from ironing out the kinks of their stunt. So today they were zooming over the rock formations by the sea to get ready when Hiccup felt his Night Fury suddenly tense. All sets of Toothless' ear flaps twitched.

"What is it, bud?"

Toothless roared and with his rider, they set off in the direction of the forest.

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He hung on for dear life by a root. Scatty had darted to her rider, quickly grabbed his arm and deposited him safely on the ground. The night fury glared at him reproachfully.

"Thank you, Scatty."

The dragon continued to glare at him.

"Okay, I'm never going to scale a rock face if I'm not ready."

The dragon didn't budge. Finally, he sighed.

"Fine. Rephrase. I'm not going to scale a rock face without you coming along for the fun."

Satisfied, Scatty snorted, and proceeded to eat the rest of her fish. He followed her and held up something triumphantly: the object he had managed to grab before he lost his footing. He grinned at his dragon. "Good news. Khor's here! He and Elene should be around here somewhere."

Scatty swallowed the last of her fish and visibly perked when her yellow-green eyes zeroed in on the Night Fury scale. Her ear flaps twitched up, and she warbled her excitement. But when Scatty sniffed the scale, she hissed and growled angrily.

His grin fell. "What's the matter? Isn't this Khor's scale?"

Scatty swiped the scale from the boy's hand and continued to growl. Not Khor's, then.

"Oh gods," he murmured softly. He recalled the whole village he'd seen earlier. If the scale didn't come from Khor, it had to come from another night fury, meaning one or more of Scatty's kin lived on this human-inhabited island. This would not be a problem had it not been for the Code of Nott, which held the boy and his fellow Nottlanders

by the oath of secrecy.

Wild dragons were by nature secretive and very protective, especially when it comes to their nests and young. The most intelligent species were much more so. That was why, long ago, as a pact of peace with the Night Furies which also inhabited their island, Nottlanders swore to keep their location and existence a secret forevermore. The Nottlanders only kept in touch with other villages via selected legionnaires called Frumentarii, who make sure the non-Nottlanders weren't a threat.

The boy felt his stomach tighten. He and his twin were patrollers, and they were on their first day of duty yesterday. That he and his twin hadn't returned to his village already put him at a stretch. He didn't want to think about the punishment he'd have to endure once he returnedâ€¦ if they were allowed to return. Lingerin on an inhabited island put him at risk of discovery, and breaking the oath was definitely grounds for exile to 'that' place. Dragon included. He did not want Scatty to be separated from her kin, and as much as he found his twin sister Elene to be annoying and self-centered, he didn't want to be separated from her either. Nor his demanding parents, for that matter.

The mere thought gave him a wave of nausea, and he swayed slightly. Scatty caught him before he fell. The night fury seemed to feel his own apprehension, because she nuzzled him continuously and didn't stop until the boy smiled.

"Thanks, girl. We'll be back. We won't be exiled," he vowed, as he righted himself. "Andâ€¦"

He sniffed. "Something's burning."

The boy and his dragon turned to the fish cooking over the fire. Smoke curled upwards into the sky.

â€¦

Toothless couldn't believe it. The sound had come from the forest, he knew. That roar wasn't from any other dragon he'd met, and he's known plenty. He'd heard it before, long ago. It was before the Red Death, before Hiccup and his band of merry ex-dragon slayers. The moment his ears picked it up, Toothless felt the adrenaline rush. He had never been more eager to fly, and if his boy knew what Toothless was thinking, he'd probably be more excited than he is.

Hiccup and Toothless tore through the sky. His boy loved flying as much as the Night Fury did, and both the dragon and his rider savored one short moment of fresh wintry air before the dragon swooped low, flying just at the treetops of the forest.

Toothless scanned the grounds below them. Hiccup observed this, and he concluded his dragon had heard something from the forest. These instances made the scrawny teen jumpy, since there was a time when his dragon had heard something from the forest, and the village of Berk was nearly burnt to a crisp by an overprotective mother Typhoomerang. Another time, Toothless had been to out to settle his long-standing vendetta, and Hiccup stepped off a cliff. That was something you don't forget easily, even if you were kidnapped by a bunch of thieving Outcasts.

"What are we looking for, bud?" Hiccup asked, glancing from the ground to the forest ahead. What he saw made him pat Toothless' head to get his dragon's attention. "There! The pillar of smoke!"

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The boy grabbed the fish by the impaling stick and Scatty swamped the ember with her tail.

"Stupid me," the boy grumbled to himself, packing his fish for later. He mounted Scatty and nudged her. The night fury ascended rapidly with a powerful beat of jet black wings.

"We need to get out of here, Scatty, or we'll be seen!" the rider told his night fury, whenâ€

"WAIT!"

The boy's spirit plummeted even as he heard dragon roar behind him. "Or not."

He urged Scatty to go faster and pulled up into the skies for cover. The Nottlander considered his position. He supposed the other peoples outside Nott had already learned to work with and ride dragons. The bad thing was that he had been seen.

His night fury clapped him with an ear flap on the shoulder in concern.

"Yeah, I know, girl," he whispered. The Code of Nott had more than just the oath of secrecy and banishment. If, in the chance that a night fury and its rider were seen, the witnesses must be neutralized to prevent loose ends. "We'll have to do it."

Scatty moaned. She didn't like the idea of killing as much as her rider is allergic to dragon nip.

"HEY! WAIT UP! We just want to talk to you!" A boy's shout echoed from behind, followed by another dragon roar. Found them already?! And more importantly, was that a night fury roar?

The Nottlander didn't look back. Instead, he double-checked his security harness and lowered his body so it was parallel to Scatty's. "Okay, Scatty, evasive maneuvers. Let's go!"

His Night Fury responded brilliantly. They flew into a thick cloud and shot upward. The other rider and his dragon followed them into the thick cloud and lost long range vision. Scatty, instead of diving forward, allowed themselves to arc back and let gravity take hold of them.

He loved the sensation brought by the steep dive, and was almost sad when Scatty pulled out of it. But then they saw the figure of the other dragon and rider below. He steeled himself, and he felt Scatty do the same. "There!"

'This is wrong,' their instincts screamed at them. But the dragon and her rider were trained to follow the code.

"Now, Scatty!"

Scatty and her rider, both with grim expressions, dived, with Scatty charging her flame before she let it loose.

* * *

><p>A.N.: Like it? Hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is always welcome.

In the next chapter, we'll find out whether a Night Fury can really shoot another Night Fury.

2. Chapter 2 - Put that away!

****A.N.:**** This chapter has gone through the watchful eyes of TMNF's new beta, ****Ckelst****. Scatty approves!

****Disclaimer:**** Someone else owns HTTYD, and that someone is not me.

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><p>Hiccup was, hands down, the best rider on Berk. On Toothless, he never felt more powerful, and his dragon probably felt the same. So when they lost track of the other Night Fury and its rider, Hiccup and Toothless shared a dose of gut-squirming shame.<p>

"Where'd they go?" Hiccup wondered out loud, echoing Toothless' thoughts as they hovered among the clouds. "Let's keep searching, bud. They can't have gone far."

His Night Fury rumbled his agreement. They started to zoom off into the clouds when a very familiar sound pierced the air. It would have struck fear into the hearts of regular Vikings, but not this Viking. Hiccup was not an ordinary Viking.

"Toothless!" He warned his dragon urgently.

'Way ahead of you!' Toothless would have said, and evaded the oncoming plasma blast. The powerful round of plasma exploded twenty feet away from them, and Hiccup found this odd. But he couldn't think about it for long; as Hiccup and Toothless recovered from a barrel roll, the other Night Fury and its rider burst forth from among the clouds. Two growling Night Furies circled each other.

"There you are!" Hiccup's gaze settled on the other dragon. He breathed out, "Another Night Fury."

The other Night Fury was nearly as large as Toothless, and looked nearly the same. It was more slender and curved. Its eyes were shaped slightly differently, and it had a complete set of wings and fins.

Hiccup locked eyes with the other rider, who looked as young as he was. By the way his lithe body was tensed like an animal ready to pounce, his jaw was set, and how wild-looking his black eyes were, like he was reining in heaping amounts of terror, Hiccup realized the

danger he and Toothless had narrowly escaped from. This boy had meant business. His dragon had fired a shot, and it wasn't a warning shot. It was an honest-to-goodness killing shot. But it had missed. Hiccup wanted to know why.

"I don't want to harm you," Hiccup persisted. "I don't know why you shot us, but please, we can talk about this!"

The other boy held his gaze. He was calculating his chances of escaping or blasting, or trusting Hiccup without breaking eye contact. Hiccup hoped the boy would choose the last option. Hiccup also noticed how the other Night Fury seemed to be alternating between angry growls against Toothless and concerned croons towards its rider, who responded by rubbing the Night Fury's neck gently.

"Whose village are you from, dragon rider?"

"Stoick the Vast of the Hairy Hooligans," Hiccup answered immediately, and saw a spark of recognition in the other rider's eyes. Soon, his father would have his hands full trying to reassure yet another tribe that Berk was not organizing a dragon army. Hiccup would have to deal with this stranger on his own for now. But he didn't think it was safe to tell a complete stranger that the chief was off to another village to re-negotiate a peace treaty. For all Hiccup knew, this rider could be a spy. Still, Hiccup felt a rush of relief by just invoking his father's name. "And you?"

The rider shared one dragon-rider moment with his Night Fury, heaved a sigh, and said, "We'll have to talk somewhere else. Privately."

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"Is this private to you?!" Evander cried out. The boy had taken him to the Berk Dragon Training Academy. At the entrance hung a lovely Night Fury emblem, which was the only friendly object in the academy as far as Scatty was concerned. Both Night Furies had swooped inside the cage-like structure to find several dragons and presumably their riders chatting among themselves. "What part of the definition of 'private' did you not understand?"

The boy shrugged, and dismounted from his dragon with a grace that surprised Evander despite the boy's half leg. "This is where we deal with dragon-related issues. And here in Berk, we face our issues together."

A rumble of agreement escaped the other Night Fury's throat.

Evander heard a collective gasp from the other riders, none of whom looked much older than he was. All of them, along with their dragons, were staring at Scatty and him. The moment he dismounted, Scatty bristled and remained restless no matter what calming trick Evander tried out, from scratches to whistles. The staring only helped elevate Scatty's stress levels, and she constantly flicked her tail from side to side and kept her body tensed. The other dragons sniffed the air curiously, and were eager to meet this newcomer.

"Can't you calm your dragon?" a snot-faced Viking asked. He stood by what Evander knew to be a Monstrous Nightmare by reading the Dragon

Keeper's Journal at Nott. Somehow, the flamboyant physique of the Nightmare fitted the apparent personality of its rider.

"She doesn't like being trapped," Evander replied evenly, glancing once at the metal framework above them. The other Night Fury rider shot him an apologetic glance. "Or any semblance of it."

"Sorry about this. It's just that the village is new to the dragon training thing," he told Evander, who nodded and continued to pacify his dragon. In his peripheral vision, Evander saw the other Night Fury rider do a double take. "Did you say she?"

Evander nodded absently. "Easy, girl. Easy. EASY."

"I'm Hiccup, by the way. And I am the head of this Dragon Training Academy."

"No, I do not succumb to hiccups, and I do not want to enroll Scatty in your Dragon Training Academy," Evander said distractedly, not averting his eyes and concentration from his Night Fury, who was still very much restless. That is, until the other Night Fury approached her.

Scatty growled.

"Stay back," Evander tried to warn the other wide-eyed dragon. Its tail was curled and lowered, its wings were raised half-open. It sniffed Scatty curiously, to which a narrow-eyed Scatty responded with a haughty snort and a painful-sounding tail-whack to the shoulder. Hiccup was at Toothless' side in an instant.

"Toothless! Are you okay?"

"That's one way of how Night Furies greet each other," Evander explained with a note of surprise. He raised an eyebrow at the other Night Fury's name. "You named your dragon 'Toothless'?"

The blonde girl stepped forward. "Enough about us. Why don't you start introducing yourself?"

Clearly intimidating and not as dainty as her body frame suggested, Evander thought unconsciously. Out loud, he told the other riders, "I'm Evander, so--"

He cleared his throat and gestured to Scatty, who had trotted away from Toothless and his rider.

"Evander. This is my dragon partner, Scathach."

"Scathach the Shadow," one of the Vikings said breathlessly. He was probably the nerd with a soft spot. He was as boulder-like as the Gronckle who nuzzled against him, and he responded with a tender hug. Yes, he was definitely the nerd with a soft spot. "They say that she was one of the female warrior twins, and the other was Aoife, but they had a falling out because of some guy. Cuckoo-lame?"

The others gaped at him, and he backed into his Gronckle as if it would shield him from the others' stares. "So anyway Scathach the Shadow."

"Apt name, is it not?" Evander agreed, moving to stand by his dragon, who still fixed her narrowed eyes at an innocent-looking Toothless. "But I call her Scatty. And by the way, it's Cuchulain."

"How did you find Berk?" the blonde girl demanded.

Evander shared shifty looks with Scatty, who snorted and jerked a head towards the others and their dragons. He sighed, then said, "Well, Berk found us. Scatty and I are, um, explorers from the, uh, north. We did a good deal of wicked flying in a storm before we crash landed here, and spent the rest of the storm in a cave in the mountains. Hiccup found me in your airspace a couple of minutes ago and... ah, led me back here. Now, who are you guys?"

"Well, you know I'm Hiccup" The other Night Fury rider began, but was shoved aside by the snot-faced Viking. "Hey!"

Confused, Evander raised an eyebrow. "Sorry, what?"

"You heard it right! This here, is Hiccup the talking fishbone," snot-guy said, earning a glare from the blond girl and Hiccup. He ignored them and gestured to the huge red Monstrous Nightmare beside him. "I'm Snotlout, the best Viking teen on Berk. Just so you know, no one crosses me and Hookfang."

Snotlout folded his arms in front of his chest, trying to intimidate the newcomer, who was irritatingly indifferent.

"Call me Astrid." The blond girl introduced herself, putting a fist to her waist. She put the other hand on the spiked blue Deadly Nadder behind her, who perked up at the physical contact. "She's Stormfly. Don't underestimate us; I'll make sure you're sorry if you do."

Evander cracked a cheeky grin. "Acknowledged."

"I'm Fishlegs," said the nerdy teen. His Gronckle nudged him again. "And this is my dearest Meatlug."

"That's a fine Gronckle you have there," Evander noted, trying for a small good-natured smile.

"And over there," the boy called Hiccup gestured to the pair of teens smacking each other's faces, "are the twins, Ruffnut and Tuffnut. They're more than a match for their Zippleback, Barf and Belch."

"Indeed," Evander agreed, nodding with saddened eyes. Scatty followed her partner's gaze. She rumbled sadly and nuzzled her rider before returning to her restless padding of her feet and unfurling and folding of wings. Evander fought down a sob, and cleared his throat. He forced a polite smile to his face which only made him look more strained, something that only Astrid seemed to pick up. "Nice to meet you all."

"I think I know how to calm Scatty without putting her to sleep," Hiccup said, fumbling inside his vest pocket. He approached the newcomers tentatively and pulled out a few leaves of dragon nip. Hiccup was idly wondering why Evander had tensed up in alarm when the other boy saw the harmless leaves in his hands.

"No! Put that away!"

"Relax! It's just dragon nip," Hiccup assured him. Scatty sniffed at Hiccup cautiously, scattering the air current. When she realized what the boy was offering her, Scatty happily succumbed to the effects of dragon nip as Hiccup rubbed the leaves on her nose.

"You see?" Hiccup turned to the newcomer as Evander passed out on the cold stone floor.

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Astrid and Hiccup found themselves inside Gothi's house while the elder tended to the feverish teen. With a gnarled hand on Evander's forehead, Gothi studied him for one long moment, then whipped up a foul-smelling broth. At that point, Evander had regained enough consciousness to sense what the elder had prepared, and after several persuasive tactics and a shuddering fit, the newcomer was napping on the cot peacefully.

"Where did you 'really' find them?" Astrid asked Hiccup.

"What he said was true. Toothless heard Scatty's roar when we went flying today," Hiccup told her. "I don't know where he's from, but once he comes to, we'll find out. And hopefully he'll explain all this."

Hiccup could barely contain his eagerness, and it shone through his bright green eyes. Astrid understood why. The previous Bork Week, he had traveled alone to what was supposed to be an island nest of Night Furies because he wanted to discover more of Toothless' kin. Sadly, it had only been a cover-up for a kidnapping plan by Alvin the Treacherous.

"But what if it's like last time?" Astrid demanded.

"I have a feeling he's not working for the Outcasts," Hiccup admitted. He hesitated for a moment, then said, "His Night Fury almost killed me by a plasma blast, but he missed. I don't get it."

"His Night Fury shot you?!" Astrid blurted out, only to be shushed by Gothi. "Sorryâ€|"

"You're complaining you survived?" Astrid asked skeptically in a lowered volume. "For all you know, he could have been here to spy on us and then destroy our village! He could be a danger to us all! And then you invited him here?"

"No! Yes! Ah, this is confusing. I don't know." Hiccup knitted his brows and said, "A Night Fury never misses once it has a fixed target. If he wanted to kill us, he would have done so by now. That's why I want to know who Evander really is, and where he's from. I want to know why they failed to shoot us, and how he met that Night Fury."

Astrid sighed. There was no convincing Hiccup otherwise once he was set on something. Astrid would bet her best hatchet that she would have to pick up his slack if he ever got in trouble.

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It didn't take long for Evander to come around. Gothi made him drink another helping of the bitter broth.

Evander made a face. "Nasty."

Gothi just smiled mysteriously at him before withdrawing to one side and letting the others ask how he was doing.

"I'm miffed you saw my allergy in action," Evander answered, a rueful smile etched on his pale face. He sat up slowly. "Dragon nip makes my body shut down, and leaves me suffering from fever and nausea. After a good nap and thatâ€|"

He eyed the empty cup in the elder's hands with a mixture of fear, awe, and spite. "â€|brothâ€| I swear it tastes even bitterer than before! But I'm better now."

"That's great!" Astrid grinned. But then her eyes turned hard again, and she spoke more forcefully. "Let me ask you again, Evander. Who are you? Why did you shoot Hiccup?"

Under the intensity of Astrid's glare, Evander wanted to back down and sleep off the wooziness he still felt. Strange. The broth should have taken care of that by now. He averted his stare from Astrid's, and found himself looking at the elder, who was studying him knowingly. "Iâ€| uhâ€|"

"Okay, let's start from the beginning," Hiccup suggested. "Where did you come from?"

Evander's eyes had turned glassy. "The Isle of Night."

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><p>A.N.: Here ends the 2nd installment. Like it? Hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is always welcome.

In the next chapter, Gothi doodles again, and guess who's going to interpret them?

3. Chapter 3 - Breaking the Oath

****A.N.:**** I'm back! Again, the beta work was done by ****Ckelst****, who inspired the reference I used in this chapter. Enjoy!

****Disclaimer:**** No, I don't own HTTYD. If I did, I'd have more Riders of Berk episodes dedicated to the Thorston twins and Fishlegs.

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><p>If Scatty had been initially cold towards Toothless, now she was borderline hostile. She had let herself be distracted by Toothless' rider, who had held out the tempting dragon nip to her. As a result, her human fell ill. Scatty did not like that at all. She had roared and snapped at the other rider, and wouldn't have let the boy carry

her rider to the village healer had Toothless not convinced her otherwise. Well, Toothless did most of the carrying.<p>

That dragon befuddled her. Her fellow Night Furies in Nott were single-minded, and their daily life was a survival of the fittest. They looked down on Scatty because she was small, and they deemed her unfit to be part of the patrol team, especially because she was female. But that didn't stop Evander from bonding with and looking out for her. In return, she spent every waking moment looking out for him and nobody else. After all, isn't that what dragon partners are supposed to do? But this was the first time she encountered a dragon that also looked out for another dragon's rider, or another dragon, for that matter.

Why couldn't he sit quietly like that Deadly Nadder by the curve? Or maybe fly away with the Gronckle, Zippleback and Monstrous Nightmare she saw earlier? Even as she sulked on one corner, a stone's throw from the healer's abode at the edge of a cliff, he kept distracting her from listening in on the humans tending to her rider. He kept trotting around her field of vision, making soft rumbling noises. Annoyed, Scatty bared her teeth at him. In response, he sat in front of her, turning his great big eyes on her and sniffing.

'It'll be okay,' he seemed to tell her through his croons. Then he did something she had never seen before.

She heard the sound of retracting teeth. Toothless lifted the edges of his serpentine mouth, revealing his gums, and leaving him entirely vulnerable to attack. The sides of his mouth went higher than the others, giving her a dragon version of something that her human did when he was happy. Toothless was smiling at her?

Throughout the entire episode that followed, a Deadly Nadder kept watch. "Keep an eye on those two," her human, Astrid, had instructed her. And it was for good reason; the other riders, who had been initially been tasked by Hiccup to look after the new Night Fury, had gone flying not too long after the three disappeared in the elder's house. Stormfly had looked up from her instinctive preening when Scatty pounced on Toothless. She tried to tell them off and behave like good dragons, to no avail. Scatty proceeded to fire small rounds of plasma at Toothless, who ducked, rolled, and jumped out of harm's way just in time. Oh yes, being stuck outside with two Strike Class dragons was taking a toll out on Stormfly, the dragon-sitter.

Scatty idly wondered why Toothless wouldn't just take off. And then she managed to set his red tail on fire. Wait! Were Night Fury tails supposed to be partly red and be able to catch fire?

Startled, Toothless lost his balance and disappeared out of view when he fell off the cliff. With a cry, Scatty dived after him.

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Hiccup thought his ears were failing him.

"But that's just a story!" Hiccup protested, but one look from the elder told him all he needed to know.

"Tell us more about this island," Astrid prodded.

"The Isle of Night is marked by a hollow mountain with a snow-capped top," Evander answered in a monotone voice. "Nott village is hidden inside the hollow mountain by a labyrinth of caves and underwater passages. Nottlanders live off fish and edible fauna, and are led by a pair of praetors."

"Praetors?" Hiccup wondered out loud, wishing that Fishlegs were here. Evander shuddered, but continued to talk.

"The founders of the village adopted a Roman political structure and enforced the Code of Nott, which made all Nottlanders swear an oath of secrecy, as part of a pact with the Night Furies that nested on the island."

Hiccup gasped. "Night Furies! So the island is their private nest? And it's being kept secret by you Nottlanders?"

"Yes."

"Are there other dragons there?" Astrid asked.

"Only their species inhabit the island."

Astrid and Hiccup exchanged eager looks. Hiccup now had a very tangible lead on other Night Furies, and Astrid understood his happiness. They didn't see that Evander's face muscles twitched, as if irritated by something.

"Do other villagers ride dragons?" asked Hiccup.

"Yes. If it is willing, a Night Fury can be partnered to a ten-year old human and they are paired for life."

Hiccup yelped in excitement. The Isle of Night DID exist! It really IS the home of Night Furies! And he had a native in front of him! Hiccup thanked Thor for the storm that led this Nottlander to Berk. Now, if only he could search for that island and reunite Toothless with his kin— but Evander's eyes refocused and he shook his head as if to clear his thoughts.

"How would you get to the Isle of Night?" Hiccup asked eagerly.

"Sorry, what?" Evander asked, wide-eyed. He glanced at Gothi suspiciously, and the elder gave him another mysterious smile. Evander felt as if he swallowed the bitter broth again as he realized what just happened. "I told you guys about my home, didn't I?"

Astrid's smirk told him all he needed.

"Oh gods, no," Evander said breathlessly, horrified. "No! I shouldn't have told you about this."

"Why not?" Astrid crossed her arms. "You show up here and we don't kill you, whereas you tried to kill Hiccup on first sight. It's the least you could do."

Evander's gaze landed on Hiccup. What Hiccup saw in the other boy's

dark eyes reminded him of how wild Evander's eyes had been when he first saw the Nottlander. Hiccup was very disturbed at how the boy was near hysterics, like he was trying to cling to whatever sanity was left to him, and it disturbed Hiccup more that he didn't know why. Not yet, at least.

"I'm not supposed to tell you. I'm on oath," Evander explained. The newcomer was startled to find a hand on his shoulder, steadying his shaking frame. The elder squeezed his shoulder gently.

"You doped me," he told her reproachfully. Gothi shrugged, as if to say 'It had to be done.' "Thanks for the broth, but you don't know what you've done. You've condemned this island to be annihilated!"

"What do you mean?!" demanded Astrid. That got her attention, and the smugness dropped from her face. Behind her, Gothi pursed her lips and turned back to her divination.

Evander put his head into his hands, and began taking deep, calming breaths. When he resurfaced, he said, "I need to see Scatty. Where is she?"

"Outside with Toothless," Hiccup replied, just as they heard a series of plasma blasts in the distance, as well as a roar which Hiccup recognized to be Toothless'.

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It was a perilous journey down from the elder's house. Apart from several close calls and a torn tunic later, Hiccup, Astrid and Evander were able to make it safely to the rocky mainland. The scorched rock face leading to higher land loomed ahead of them. All they saw were burn marks and one restless Nadder. No Night Furies. Stormfly remained on the rock ledge, and she was screeching at something below.

"Stormfly, what happened?" Astrid was first to reach her dragon partner. The Nadder stared deep into Astrid's eyes, and jerked her head to the ocean below. Hiccup craned his neck and stepped out as far as he dared. He didn't see anything out of the ordinary, except that two dragons were missing, as were the supposed-to-be dragon guardians.

Evander took one look at Stormfly and blanched. "Dut-duh-duh. I'm dead. They've flown away."

"Toothless can't fly without me!" Hiccup cried out.

"What?" Evander's face twisted in confusion.

"His artificial tail fin needs to be controlled by a rider in flight," Hiccup answered. "He can't fly by himself!"

"Let's go look for them," Astrid decided. She and Hiccup mounted Stormfly, and pulled a stunned Evander on with them.

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With Stormfly's help, they found the two missing dragons on Thor's

beach. Hiccup, Astrid and Evander were surprised to see how Scatty had changed. Somehow, Toothless had earned Scatty's trust, and the two were playfully wrestling each other. Occasionally, one of them would shoot plasma, and the other would try to swat it with a wing, a paw, or another round of plasma. Stormfly settled nearby, keeping her cautious eyes on the pair of Night Furies. She even neglected her preening; her spines tensed every time a round of plasma was shot.

"Wow, Scatty seems to like Toothless," Astrid noted. Hiccup mirrored her smile. He would have been thoroughly content that Toothless had found a playmate of his own species now, except for that annihilating business Evander had brought up, and that Toothless' red tail fin had suffered a severe burn. By the looks of its charred remains, the tail needed replacing.

"That lucky guy," Evander muttered, a crooked grin forming on his pale face.

"What do you mean?" Hiccup asked. Evander just grinned, his hand on Hiccup's shoulder for support. He wasn't supposed to be walking around yet, let alone flying on a Nadder to locate his dragon partner. But Evander needed Scatty. It was a comfort thing.

"So. What were you saying about Berk being destroyed?" Hiccup asked casually, as if this was just him asking which fish he should cook for dinner.

"How can you be so casual about it?" Evander asked incredulously.

Hiccup shot him a withering glance. "Oh I don't know. Maybe if you would just explain to us why you were bursting at the seams earlier trying to tell us about it, then we'd take you seriously."

Evander bristled. Between the twins, he was more of the nutty curious one, while Elene was the fun-loving sarcastic one. Hiccup's sarcasm painfully reminded Evander of Elene. Another problem he had to solve.

"Give me a minute," Evander said, his voice abnormally shaky. Letting go of his grip on Hiccup's shoulder, he stepped forward and called his dragon partner. "Scathach!"

The female Night Fury's ears twitched up at the call, and she bounded towards her rider joyfully. Toothless' ears drooped when she left, but he settled when Hiccup and Astrid came for him and Stormfly, who looked very much relieved to see Astrid.

Scathach the Night Fury warbled excitedly, happy that her rider was okay.

"Hey, girl, you found a new friend?"

Scatty crooned and nuzzled her rider affectionately. Evander smiled and scratched the dragon's neck absently. "I'm glad. But, listen. You know the oath I swore when we first met?"

The Night Fury cocked its head to the side. Her yellow-green eyes flashed with recognition.

"I broke it," Evander admitted. Scatty's eyes widened. "I was forced into it. I'm sorry, girl."

Scathach snorted, and poked him with her nose playfully.

"What? You're not upset by it?" Evander gaped at his dragon, who fixed him under a stern gaze.

"Okay, so you're upset to some degree, but why are you being so light about it?"

Scatty waved her tail, and averted her lamp-like eyes. Evander followed Scatty's gaze to see Hiccup and Astrid laughing about something while Toothless and Stormfly settled comfortably by their riders. Scatty flexed her tail fins in front of Evander, and jerked her head in the general direction of Toothless. And then he understood.

"Oh."

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With the dragons socializing among themselves, Evander, after deciding to trust them, explained the basics of the Code of Nott and the whole annihilating business to them. Hiccup, and Astrid both agreed not to tell anyone else about Nott save the chief, which was a big relief for the Nottlander. Hiccup felt sorry for Evander, when the latter confessed grimly that he couldn't return to his village now to avoid setting the Berk Ragnarok day earlier.

"I don't get you," Astrid said. "First, you attack Hiccup, then you tell us that you don't want your clan to attack Berk."

Evander turned away from them. He watched the seawater beat against the smooth rocks. He felt like his life had a sudden similarity to the fate of those rocks. He was rough and unpolished; would these recent turn of events smooth him out too? But how should he be smoothed? Did he want to be changed?

"Tide's setting in," he said, glancing once to the rising water level. "We should get going."

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Scatty was feeling guilty for burning his tail, but was glad when Hiccup was not angry about making a replacement. With much gusto, she guided Toothless when it came to using the tail for stability, and for once she was glad she had paid attention to her mom about flight assist. They swooped inside the academy after Stormfly and Astrid, and were glad that it was mercifully empty of other dragons and people. Except for one elder standing at the center.

Gothi made it clear that she wanted the younger ones to follow her. But what of the dragons?

Toothless and Scathach were left at the arena, much to the latter dragon's dismay. Evander didn't want to attract too much attention, and he was pretty certain that a Night Fury merited a second or even a third glance on Berk. Evander promised her a basketful of fish if

she stayed put there, and Scatty agreed. Toothless would not let his new friend be upset, and they continued where they'd left off at play time.

Hiccup and Evander turned their backs on their Night Furies with apprehension. What if they disappeared again?

Stormfly had wanted to go with her human, but Astrid muttered quietly to her, saying, "Guard them for me? We'll be back soon."

The Deadly Nadder eyed the two black dragons anxiously. Dragon-sitter again. Oh joy.

Gothi led them down to the village proper, where the rest of the Hooligans were wrapping up their chores for the day. As they made their way through the streets, Evander was scrutinized by the other villagers. Evander returned their stares with what his twin nicknamed "the dragon-stare," because she said it reminded her of her own Night Fury's glare. They went straight to Gobber's place, which turned out to be a blacksmith shop converted into a dragon-vet clinic. A dragon tooth hung at the entrance, which fascinated Evander.

"That's from Hookfang," Astrid supplied, when she caught him trying to touch it. Evander quickly dropped his hands.

"Oh, I thought about that." He grinned sheepishly. "So why are we here?"

"Gobber's the only one who can interpret Gothi's picture predictions," Hiccup explained, as the elder ushered them inside. Hiccup went straight to a back room, and set the remains of Toothless' tail there.

Gobber, as he turned out, was a typical Viking who spoke with a strange accent. Gothi prodded him with her wooden staff. He jumped, pointing his left hammer hand threateningly. The elder just gave him the 'look', and he backed down.

"What brings ye lot here in me shop?" he asked, replacing his hammer hand with a hook hand. Hiccup stepped out of the backroom.

"Gobber," Hiccup began, gesturing to boy beside him. "This is Evander. He was grounded on Berk after the storm last night. I found him earlier and—uh, I think Gothi's here to tell us about what we should do about him. We need you to read her doodles."

Gothi whacked him with her staff.

"Sketches," Hiccup corrected himself, rubbing the spot she hit. Evander was starting to dislike the elder less after she made him drink the broth spiked with what he suspected to be truth potion.

As the elder started to scribble on the ground, Gobber gave Evander the once over, and said, "Yer not bad for a newcomer. Some storm yeh went thru last night, eh?"

Evander nodded fervently. Gobber gave a hearty laugh. "So, where're ye from?"

Hiccup, Astrid, and Evander exchanged looks.

"I'm from up north," Evander supplied. Gobber gave him a shrewd look, but the boy peered over the elder's shoulder. "So what does the elder want to tell me?"

Astrid raised an impressed eyebrow. The boy knew how to handle suspicion, she would give him that.

"She says tha' you'd need our help if ye want to find yer sister," Gobber interpreted. How he managed to make sense of the drawings, Hiccup couldn't fathom.

"Obviously. Since I can't get around without you Hairy Hooligans." Evander said darkly, as if a nerve of his had been touched.

"You didn't say anything about a sister," Astrid said. "Was that why you looked so upset when you saw Ruff and Tuff?"

"Yes. We got separated when we flew into the storm last night." The boy muttered sadly. His eyes widened when he used the term 'flew', but luckily the blacksmith/dragon vet was busy studying the newest doodles.

"An' tha' we'd have a week to prepare fer an attack!" Gobber paused, and his hook hand dropped to his side. "An attack! Are yeh sure, Gothi?"

The elder shot him an impish glare. For a small wizened lady, Evander thought she was mighty scary. And that was shoving the thought of an attack aside.

"Wha' sort of attack?" Gobber asked. Gothi scribbled again. Hiccup and Astrid thought it looked like a bearded baby riding an elongated worm that sprouted two spikes. Evander was sure it was Night Furies storming the island and burning the village down. He bit his lip, preparing for the worst.

"Trolls taming worms?!" Gobber blurted out, as if his nightmares had come true. Gothi added an obscure detail, and Gobber squinted at it for a few moments then declared, "No, it's Alvin and the Outcasts riding dragons!"

"Alvin's riding dragons?" Hiccup piped up, tormented by the idea.

"How could they learn how to?" I recovered the Book of Dragons from him!" Astrid exclaimed. She looked at Hiccup, whose eyes were glaring at the furnace as if it was his archenemy.

"Mildew," Hiccup said firmly. "I taught him how to bond with a Nadder when we were looking for Toothless. He must have taught Alvin how to train dragons!"

Gobber rattled off a series of very painful ways how he'd want to torture this Mildew person, which surprised Astrid and Hiccup. Evander, however, was looking quite relieved, much to Astrid's indignance. She glared at him, and he shot back, "What? At least you know this Alvin oddity is not going to ride Night Furies here."

"How do yeh know they don' have Night Furies?" Gobber demanded. He

brought his hooked hand to Evander's face, but the boy held his ground and stared into Gobber's eyes.

"Iâ€ uh, I told him," Hiccup said. Gobber risked a glance towards Hiccup. "Toothless is the only Night Fury for miles around."

"Hmmmâ€|." Gobber began sizing up Evander again, when Hiccup tapped his shoulder.

"Soâ€| you go with Gothi and alert the rest of the village," the scrawny boy said.

"An' wha' are yeh goin' ter do?" Gobber pointed his hook hand at Hiccup.

"I'm going to warn my father," he replied, dropping his gaze to floor. Evander wanted to ask why Hiccup's dad was so important to this. "He's gone to another village for a treaty."

"But, Hiccup, trips like that last for two days even on a dragon," Astrid countered. Evander wanted to point out that on a Night Fury, the time would be halved at the very least, but he stopped himself. "And you don't even know where that is, exactly!"

"Stoick told me." Gobber shrugged. "Yer dad said it's up north."

"Wait. Stoick the Vast is your dad?" Evander stared wide-eyed at Hiccup. "You're the chief's son?"

"Got a problem with that?" Astrid asked, balling her fists.

"No, I don't!" Evander amended. It confused him that it was Astrid who spoke for Hiccup, who had a scowl etched on his freckled face. Evander raised his open hands and laughed uneasily. "By the way, I could help you since I know my way around the northern lands and seas. What's the village called?"

Evander stared into the blank faces of the Hairy Hooligans.

"Unfortunately, Stoick forgot ter say the name of the village."

All three teens glared at the blacksmith/vet, and Gothi respectfully remained silent while watching the whole exchange.

"A' right! I was busy tending to that Zippleback's molar! I don' know if he did say it."

"Gobber!" Both Astrid and Hiccup cried out.

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"An attack." Hiccup blurted in disbelief, once the adults left to gather the rest of the Hooligans at the great hall. He needed a moment before he started on the burnt tail fin. "By the Outcasts riding dragons."

Evander wondered why those Outcasts riding dragons seemed such a

surprising idea to Hiccup, when he found the boy to be a natural rider. Evidently, riding dragons, which is one thing he grew up with, had been a recent phenomenon to these Hairy Hooligans.

"Is dragon riding new here?" Evander asked.

"Yes, it is," Astrid answered impatiently, ignoring the Nottlander's surprise. "And stop looking so upbeat, Evander."

"Look," Evander replied. "I don't know who this Alvin and those Outcasts are. They could be training chipmunks to sing and dance for all I care, but you really are far better off than you might think. If a swarm of mixed dragon species is giving you a lot of trouble, think about a whole elite squad of Night Furies and their equally strategic riders!"

"You're right, you don't know Alvin!" Astrid snapped. "He's the worst Viking you could ever go up against, because he'll stop at nothing to get what he wants. He blackmailed Heather, and sent her as a spy just to learn the secret to dragon training. He managed to kidnap Hiccup just to learn how to train dragons! Now that he's on a dragon—"

"I hate that he's using dragons as weapons," Hiccup spat out, disgusted.

"Dragons are not weapons for one to exploit," Evander agreed. There was a dark solemnity in his tone that Astrid noticed, and her respect for him rose up a couple of notches.

"All this talk is not helping us find the chief," Astrid pointed out.

"There must be something he's mentioned," Hiccup muttered, immersing himself in thought.

"Maybe we could ask a tracker?" Evander suggested. When the others came up blank, he scoffed. "Come on! You know that dragons have a keen sense of smell! Scatty's not as good as Cinder, the best tracker on Nott, but she'll be able to locate your dad."

Astrid and Hiccup both looked at Evander, who grinned sheepishly. "Okay, so next problem! What do you guys want to do now?"

Eyes burning with determination, Astrid punched the wall of the smithy/clinic. "That's easy. We'll prepare for the attack. No Outcast is taking Berk without a fight. We will defend our land."

Astrid rounded on Evander. "And you? Where do you stand?"

"I have to look for my sister," the boy answered shortly, trying to be certain about what he said. But to Hiccup and Astrid, he only looked uncertain.

"There's a 'but' in there somewhere," Hiccup noted.

"I'm already qualified for exile, so I might as well have a little fun before the actual punishment," Evander decided, forming a wry grin. "So Scatty and I are going to help Hiccup locate his father, and maybe help out you guys with this attack thing. Who knows, maybe

I might find Elene along the way?"

"Just one question," Astrid said. A skeptical look crossed her face. "How do we know you're not going to set a whole squad of Night Fury riders on us?"

Evander puffed out his chest. "And burn this lovely little Viking village? From what I've seen, Berk is a home for dragons too, and it's endangered. I have nothing to gain from destroying it, or letting someone else do the destroying. So humor me and let me be part of your team to help defend this dragon sanctuary. I'll do my best. Nottlander's promise."

Astrid wasn't entirely assured, but she seemed satisfied for now. Evander read her expression, _Just you try_.

On the contrary, a small smile crept into Hiccup's face. "That's the spirit! Now who wants to help me repair Toothless' tail fin?"

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><p>A.N.: Who else is an Alvin and the chipmunks fan out there? Go check out ****Ckelst**** one-shots referencing those cuddly singing threesome. What did you think of this chapter? Like it? Hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is always welcome.

In the next chapter, Hiccup and Evander head out to track Stoick, or so they initially assumed.

4. Chapter 4 - Babysitting

With the three of them working on the tail, Toothless had a new tail fin in record time. Hiccup was just doing the last minute quality control check when the other riders touched down by the forge. Astrid and Hiccup weren't pleased that they had deserted their dragon-sitting task. After Astrid told them about Scathach and Toothless going missing, Snotlout was the first to defend himself.

"Dragon-sitting?" Snotlout scoffed.

"Boring!" Tuffnut jeered.

Snotlout raised his meaty arms emphatically. "Why sit around and watch a dragon when we can fly on one?"

"Do you know how unnerving it is to have a Night Fury stare daggers at you?" Fishlegs asked. He muttered on about a certain Gronckle's stress levels, which the female twin ignored.

"And snarled at?" Ruffnut added.

"I do, and said Night Fury pinned me down on a rock while he was at it," Hiccup muttered.

"Ooh! What did he do next?" Evander asked eagerly.

"Well, he roared at me then left," Hiccup answered, with a slight shudder.

"And?" Evander prodded. The other didn't answer audibly, but Evander could just make out the mouthed words when Hiccup whispered, "I fainted."

"Face it, Dragon-nip boy," Snotlout said, sneering. "You're not in control of your dragon. Spend a couple of days with us, and you'll be good."

"Excuse me?!" Evander huffed, taking a step closer to the bigger boy.

"Okay, that's enough, you two," Astrid said, stepping between Snotlout and Evander. Astrid stared pointedly in the Nottlander's dark eyes. Snotlout continued to sneer. Evander stepped back and bared his teeth in a feral snarl.

"Never question my partnership with Scathach," Evander told Snotlout. It was said as plain as day, but it had a dangerous ring to it that threatened Snotlout's cheekiness. Snotlout frowned, and Hiccup knew this could be big trouble if he didn't intervene.

"Okay, Astrid!" Hiccup piped up. He put down the tail fin and joined Astrid between the feuding boys. "I volunteer to babysit Evander. Why don't you take Snotlout and the others to the great hall to plan our defense?"

"Baby-sit?" Evander cried out indignantly.

Ruffnut's eyes went wide. "What defense?"

"Why would we need to defend ourselves?" Tuffnut added.

Fishlegs gulped as he realized, "We're going to be under attack, aren't we?"

"Radical!" Tuffnut cried out, punching the air with a fist. "Who's raiding Berk?"

"Yeah, what problem are we into this time?" Ruff asked.

"The Outcast kind," Hiccup answered grimly.

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Hiccup fully trusted Astrid to organize the dragons and their riders while he was going to find his father. Apart from the teens, several other Berk Vikings had been able to bond and ride their own dragons. If anyone else would be able to ready the riders of Berk, Astrid could. The riders, the other dragons and the other Vikings gathered in the great hall for supper and to discuss battle tactics. Hiccup kept an eye on Evander, who wasn't allowed in the meeting. It was one of the easiest missions Hiccup had had so far. He got along with the Nottlander fairly well, and they easily swapped Night Fury anecdotes on the way to the docks. Hiccup learned a few calming tricks and several hand signals from Evander, who had been impressed by Hiccup's progress in training Toothless on his own.

"What's Nott like?" Hiccup asked suddenly. The two boys each carried a basket full of fish for their dragons. Evander had surprised Hiccup

when the former paid for the fish using a gold coin that Hiccup found fascinating. Evander laughed when he saw this, and he surprised Hiccup even further when he gave Hiccup one of the coins for the Hooligan to keep. Hiccup stashed it in a vest pocket. He'd have to examine it later. Toothless' new tail fin was strapped to Hiccup's back, and waiting to be attached to the Night Fury's tail.

Evander's eyes went wide. "Why are you asking me that?"

"I want to go there," Hiccup answered firmly, looking Evander in the eye. "And I want to be prepared when I do."

"Did you miss the part that no outsiders are allowed to enter? The sentries will shoot you down at first sight!" Evander shot back.

"I know that!" Hiccup snapped. Then his green eyes softened. "But I also know that I want Toothless to have other Night Fury friends. I don't know if he had family before we bonded, but whenever I see Meatlug and the others with their families, I can't help but want Toothless to experience the same thing with his own kin again."

Evander considered for a moment, then said, "Let's finish our mission first, then I'll think about it."

When he saw that Hiccup looked put out, he added in a low voice, "I think I can say this. Berk is a lot sunnier and more carefree than Nott. And you Hooligans smile a lot more than Nottlanders. Except maybe that girl. Astrid, right? I understand that I'm new here and everything, so she's within her right to be really cold and suspicious. But it's like she's expecting me to commit bloody murder any minute."

"Oh, Astrid?" Hiccup nearly tripped over an exposed rock, but a goofy grin crept on his face and his eyes sparkled when he said, "She's amazing like that."

Evander smiled ruefully. "Am I right in thinking that she really cares about you?"

"Yeah, I do too," Hiccup admitted distractedly. The smile was still plastered on his face. Evander shook his head, and continued walking with Hiccup leading the way.

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"Scatty!" Evander called, to which the Night Fury promptly responded by bounding towards the boy and knocking him to the ground. The basketful of fish scattered, and Scatty visibly brightened. When Evander righted himself, he told the dragon, "We're going on a tracking mission, girl. Think you're up to it?"

Just as Evander said this, Toothless made a noise somewhere between a sob and a hiss. He trotted towards Scatty and softly groaned.

"We're all going together, don't you worry," Evander assured Toothless.

"It's the first time he's seen another Night Fury on Berk," Hiccup explained as he reached his dragon. He set down Toothless' new tail fin

and basket of food. Toothless started on his share immediately. "I can't blame him for wanting company of his own kind."

"That lucky guy," Evander said, grinning. He faced Toothless squarely, and the dragon narrowed his eyes. "Don't look at me like that, Toothless. I may not know how you ended up here, but I do know that Scatty's not easily impressed by male Night Furies. She's been courted ever since she made it into the elite patrol team, and she's never responded to anyone except you."

Hiccup smiled in response, and continued to work on attaching Toothless' tail fin. It fit perfectly. Hiccup moved to stand beside Evander, who had been talking to Toothless. Scatty held up a whole cod with her mouth, and turned to Toothless, who in turn, clamped his mouth over a mackerel. Both Night Furies tossed their fishes in the air, and allowed the other to catch it.

"You never told me why you shot us," Hiccup said, when they had a good laugh over their dragon's eating antics. "Or rather, why you missed."

The other boy was silent for a moment. He took the bread Hiccup offered and sat on the ground by Scatty. Hiccup did the same with Toothless.

"Hiccup," Evander began, "Does Berk have a set of rules they have to follow, too?"

"Ummf-hmmf." Hiccup nodded through a mouthful of bread. Evander took out the cold, slightly burnt fish from that morning and offered some to Hiccup.

"But you don't have any formal agreements when it comes to your dragons and war yet?" Evander clarified, ripping off a piece of bread and popping it into his mouth.

Hiccup nodded again. "We have this unspoken agreement that the dragons nest on Berk, and we train them so we can be friends with them."

After he swallowed the bread, Evander continued, "You might want to address that issue with the other riders, especially with the attack coming and all. Make it as clear as a Night Fury against white clouds that all you trained dragons are there as companions, that you train them to make sure you can coexist with them peacefully, and that you can defend Berk better against raids and all that.

"You never know when a next generation kid can overturn everything the whole town stands for. Or when another village will ultimately see dragon training as a threat. Nott has seen a good few tribes be wiped out by allied forces just because they were growing powerful than the allied bullies. It's partly why Nottlanders have lived like hermits for generations; to keep the outside world from ever deciding on a Nottlander massacre."

Hiccup winced. "Yeah, we're working on that. It's why dad is away; he's gone to negotiate a treaty."

"I'm thinking it's not going so well," Evander remarked, as he noticed Hiccup's glum expression. "The villages see dragon training

as a threat. And as soon as the Berserkers hear of this, they'll... go berserk."

"I'm hoping it wouldn't get to that," Hiccup admitted. "It's not like I'm training Toothless and the others to be weapons. I don't ever want to use Toothless or any other dragon as a weapon for war. Especially the conquering-other-lands kind."

"Is that why this Alvin person decided to launch a huge scale dragon invasion on Berk? To claim it?" Evander asked.

"Probably." Hiccup replied, his eyes glinting. "So why did you fail to shoot me?"

"You are wily, you know that?" Evander sighed. Hiccup was not be distracted. "Anyway, all Nott villagers swear the oath of secrecy I told you guys about. And when I say secrecy, I mean absolute secrecy. No one else, apart from the villagers and Night Furies, is supposed to know where the island is. And if an outsider found out, or saw one of the islands' inhabitantsâ€¦"

"Annihilated," Hiccup finished darkly.

Evander grinned sheepishly. "I was going for 'neutralized.'"

Hiccup shrugged. "You already told us about that. But you missed your shot."

Evander gestured to Hiccup and Toothless. "Duly proven."

"A Night Fury never misses," Hiccup reminded him.

"Very rarely," Evander agreed. He looked up at Scatty, who was enjoying her food. He lowered his voice. "But a Night Fury has never aimed like that for another Night Fury before. I haven't killed anyone either. Iâ€¦ can't. We couldn't."

Hiccup swallowed a piece of slightly burnt fish and sent Evander a good-natured smile. "I think I understand why."

Surprised, Evander gaped at him. Hiccup was starting to become less of the Viking he was expecting him to be. "You do?"

Throughout the rest of dinner, Hiccup told him how he met his Night Fury, and the some of the adventures he'd had with the dragon. Evander made a great audience. He didn't make faces, nor interrupt while Hiccup was talking, and he reacted in just the right places. He had laughed when Hiccup told him about the fish he shared with Toothless, had grimaced when Stoick restrained Toothless as a dragon guide to the nest, and had gasped when the gripping tale of the Red Death was done.

"You know, Berk still has the attack to prepare for," Hiccup reminded Evander once they'd had a nice light-hearted laugh over Hiccup's one-legged misadventures following the Red Death's death.

"You don't need to tell me," Evander groaned.

Hiccup's thoughts swirled in his head. He didn't plan to get shot by another Night Fury, and he most certainly didn't want Berk to be

attacked by any tribe, Berserker, Outcast, nor Nottlander. Hiccup thought it was a coincidence that Evander found himself on Berk on the same day that the Outcast attack was predicted by Gothi. He trusted the Nottlander enough that Evander wasn't going to destroy Berk, but after turning Evander's explanation of Nott village and its Code over and over, Hiccup was led to believe that there was more to this random attack than just vengeance. Something must have triggered Alvin to mobilize the Outcasts. But what?

"Evander, don't you think it's a bit odd?"

"What is?"

"The timing of Gothi's prediction and your arrival here, I mean."

Evander's brow furrowed, and he frowned. Hiccup realized what his words suggested, so he tried to amend. "Hey! I'm not accusing you or anything. I just thought there might be something else to the attack that we're not taking into account."

"Maybe," Evander said, apparently deep in thought. Finally, he stood up and stretched. Scatty followed suit. "We'll figure it out somehow. Scatty and I will be off to our cave. See you at dawn, Hiccup."

Hiccup frowned. This person was going to help him find his father in the morning. It didn't seem right to Hiccup to let him sleep outdoors, despite what Evander said about outdoor training. But, knowing Evander, Hiccup had to go about this subtly. "Aren't you going to look for something to help track my dad with?"

"We can take of this tomorrow before we leave," Evander told him. "I was planning on using you as a basis, actually. But it helps if you have something that has his aura and scent. Like a spare boot, or cape."

"I have a whole house full of his stuff," Hiccup replied.

"That'll do!" Evander told him, and mounted Scatty. Before they could take off, Hiccup found himself inviting Evander to his home for a sleepover.

"Are you sure you won't mind me staying there?" Evander asked, wide-eyed.

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"I wouldn't mind having company at home since it's just me and Toothless," Hiccup assured him for the third time. Hiccup led the way inside, and Toothless lit the tinder stone for warmth.

Evander sighed with relief. It felt great to be warm in a proper house. But his spirits sank when he thought of his twin and his parents. He had a gut feeling they weren't enjoying themselves as he was. His parents would be worried sick, even if Evander knew they'd never reveal it to anyone. Evander could think of several vile situations that Elene could find herself in, and it included being shot down by those Berserkers. Evander hoped not.

A low rumble shook Evander out of his thoughts. When he looked up, Hiccup grinned at him from upstairs.

"C'mon, you've got to see this!" Hiccup beckoned Evander to join him.

When Evander reached to top of the stairs, Toothless was nudging Scatty gently on a stone slab which Evander supposed to belong to Toothless. When Scatty obliged and flamed the slab, Toothless settled down on the space beside Hiccup's bed.

"I don't mind you guys, and Toothless won't, either," Hiccup told Evander with a tone of finality, and Toothless heartily agreed.

"Well, in that case, thanks!" Evander said gratefully, and settled down by Scatty's side. She wrapped a wing around him, keeping the boy warm. His head poked out comically, but Hiccup didn't comment on it, not with Scatty there. So after Hiccup put away his flight suit and saddle, he tucked himself in bed, and tried to sleep.

"Evander, how did you meet Scatty?" Hiccup asked, when sleep wouldn't claim him. He glanced at the other boy, who became sober. "Oh, right. Yeah. Oath of secrecy."

"It's all right," Evander told him. Evander's gaze landed on the stuffed Nadder at the bed's head rest and idly wondered if the missing motherly presence in the household might have been responsible for the existence of that toy. "It's just thatâ€¦ I'veâ€¦"

He shook his head. "What am I thinking? Scatty chose me, not the other way around."

"What do you mean?" Hiccup asked. Evander was silent for a few moments.

"In Nott," Evander explained, "we have a very different way of bonding with dragons for the very first time. Children are left alone in a Night Fury nest, and a pair is formed once a rider and a dragon realize that they could work together to get out of the nest. Usually it's male to male and female to female. But me and my twin, we're oddities. We're not the biggest kids in our generation, and yet my petite sister bonded with the largest male dragon and named him 'Khor.' With all the robust males I could have bonded with, the dragon who chose me was the smallest, and one of the few females of her generation."

Evander's gut squirmed. It was drilled into every Nottlander child that the outside world was to be treated with extreme caution, aside from the oath of secrecy. Outsiders were not to be trusted, especially with the secrets of Nott. That he was describing a Nott tradition to an outsider went against his instincts, but it wasn't the first time he'd done that today. Strangely, it felt nice to be able to share his dragon experiences with Hiccup. Evander found the boy easy to talk with. Hiccup wasn't obnoxious, rude nor intimidating; he spoke with kindness, sincerity and with the more-than-occasional sarcasm, which wasn't very Viking-like at all to Evander, but the Nottlander didn't mind. Instead of a strong robust body, the boy had been equipped with a ready mind, efficient working

hands, and a witty tongue.

"You talk as if dragons are more than just pets," Hiccup observed.

Evander frowned. "Dragons aren't pets. I thought you knew that, especially that you're bonded with a Night Fury. They are life partners, animal companions. Pets have a master-beast ring to it, if you catch my drift."

Hiccup shared a moment with Toothless before he answered, "Well, Toothless is my best friend. He's not just my pet dragon."

"You know," Evander added slowly, eyeing Hiccup's left leg, then shifting his gaze back to the male Night Fury curled up beside Hiccup. "Toothless is lucky that he found you. No one in Nott would help a fallen Night Fury. If Toothless had been shot down at my place, he would have been grounded for good."

Hiccup shot a quick smile to Evander. "It wasn't easy. I had to sneak into the forge to make the saddle and tail fin. When I was learning how to fly Toothless, I had to make sure we wouldn't be seen, or we'd both be dead. But it sounds like you've had your fair share of shenanigans with Scatty."

"If we live through this mission and siege, I'll definitely consider telling you," Evander said, yawning. He slipped his head under Scatty's wing, and soon, all Hiccup could focus on were their nearly synchronized breathing. Not long after, Hiccup drifted off into the realm of dreams too.

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Despite the grim objectives of the mission, their dragons were at least having a bit of fun, much to their riders' amusement.

After a quick bite at the great hall, Evander tagged along as Hiccup rummaged through the house and held out one of Stoick's non-ceremonial belts for Scatty. She sniffed it fervently, committing the scent to memory. Toothless did the same at just about the same time. They stood stock still for a few moments. Then suddenly, both Night Furies were raring to go outside.

"He's mimicking her," Hiccup noted, curiosity glinting in his eyes.

"No; it's like he's trained like Scatty is!" Evander exclaimed, as Hiccup opened the door. Evnader sincerely wondered about Toothless' origins. He was beginning to think that Hiccup's dragon partner had once nested at Nott, but he set these thoughts aside to focus on the mission at hand.

After a pre-flight check, they took off. Toothless and Scatty flew once around Berk to determine a lead; Toothless found it first.

With a powerful beat of his jet black wings, Toothless tore through the sky near his top speed. He wasn't going to do any fancy flying moves today, yet he was ecstatic; Toothless was glad he could fly with another dragon without worrying about leaving the other behind. But Scatty was more than a match for Toothless. She had a complete

set of wings and fins, and the fact that she was slightly smaller and lighter helped too. Scatty taunted him as she flew past Toothless. This only made Toothless more excited.

Soon, the little speck called Berk Island disappeared behind them. Hiccup was wondering how many more Night Fury secret arts he could learn from Evander when the other boy turned to him.

"So, which way to Outcast Island?" Evander asked.

"What? We're supposed to be tracking my dad!" Hiccup protested.

Evander scoffed. "Come on. Night Furies can cover the estimated distance in less than two days. Time is not our main problem. Knowledge of the opponent, however..."

"The Hairy Hooligans have been fending off dragons for three hundred years," Hiccup told him with certainty. "We can handle a few stubborn Outcasts."

"How about Outcasts riding dragons?"

Hiccup's composure faltered. "That might be more of a problem. We don't know how many riders and trained dragons they have. But when I was held at Outcast Island, I saw a Scauldron, a Changewing and a Whispering Death in cages."

Evander considered for a moment, then shook his head. "Too bad I wasn't paying attention when dad was lecturing about those Outcasts. All I know is that they were banished Vikings from different tribes, and they can be cunning. Anything else we know about? Battle strategies? Formations? Aces?"

"I don't know," Hiccup admitted, looking very cross.

"Then why don't we find out?" Evander suggested. "You don't look like someone who works out a plan without knowing all the details."

Hiccup grinned. "You, sir, are starting to know me disturbingly well."

Evander shrugged. Hiccup veered off to the left, and Toothless rumbled in apprehension.

"We'll use the clouds as cover," Hiccup shouted over the roaring wind, once he determined they were in Outcasts waters. "We do a once-around over their island, gather as much information as we can, and fly off. Remember, just a QUICK look. We still need to locate my father."

"Gotcha."

"And watch out for the catapults. They throw nasty nets and bolas that can bringdown a Night Fury. Stay clear of stray dragons and their riders."

"Got it. Anything else?"

"Don't be seen!"

"The fog will do that for us," Evander assured him, but as the island came into view, a thin layer of fog failed to hide the entirety of Outcast Island, a gloomy outcrop of rock jutting above the sea. Evander groaned. "Berk looks so much better."

"Yeah," Hiccup agreed. As they flew closer, they pulled up into the cloud layer to avoid being seen. He called to Evander, "Okay, change of plans!"

Evander glanced at him warily.

"How do you feel about terrorizing a few Outcasts?"

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****A.N.:**** I had fun developing the bond between these two riders and their dragons. I wish I could have included the other riders as well, but that won't happen until chapter 6. To those who find long conversations boring, I can tell you that the action begins next chapter. Thanks again, Ckelst, for ironing out the kinks in this chapter.

In the next chapter, Hiccup, Evander, Toothless and Scatty find something (or someone's?) else on Outcast Island, with upsetting consequences.

5. Chapter 5 - The Right Thing

Evander's smirk matched the draconian version Scatty was sporting. Hiccup had asked them to cause a diversion long enough to distract the Outcasts, so that he could snoop around. Evander and Scatty had been through combat training before, but they would never have thought that they'd find themselves using their training for something likeâ€| this. Evander was never the flamboyant twin, and preferred quiet surgical strikes to bombastic attacks. But there's always a first time for everyone.

"Are you ready, Scatty?" The Night Fury rumbled excitedly. "Let's go."

Scatty dived, charging up her flame as she went.

"NIGHT FURY!"

"GET DOWN!"

The shot of plasma exploded close to where a group of Outcasts were gathered. It set a guard post on fire, and the sentries fled from the burning structure.

"Muahahaha! Run, disorganized wimps, run!" Evander knew it was unbecoming for a trained Nottlander like him to take out frustration on the bad guys in that way, but the boy found it strangely relieving. He was also silently thankful that he was the only Nottlander around, and no one was there to hit him for being seen. Or so he thought.

"Catapults! Fire at will!"

Evander pulled up, and Scatty expertly weaved in and out of the paths of the projectiles aimed at them. Soon, they disappeared among the clouds. "Okay, so some of them kept their heads on. No dragons so far. Scatty, disarming tactics."

Scatty darted from the clouds and aimed for the catapults. Zigzagging among the flying rocks headed her way, she hit a few of the offending catapults. Evander ducked as a rock flew past where his head had been.

"Whoops! You missed. How come we don't get this much fun at Nott, Scatty?" He grinned mischievously at the Outcasts below. Evander was thoroughly amused that a single dragon and rider could wreak havoc on ground troops, until he remembered that some of these Vikings were headed to Berk riding dragons. He thought of how these Outcasts would storm Nott, and he did not like the idea, as much as Nott villagers were experienced dragon riders.

No, he would not let these people destroy a village just to claim it for their own!

Uttering a loud battle cry, he and Scatty flew and blasted some more.

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BOOM.

Hiccup and Toothless had swooped low, and Toothless chose to land near the dungeons at the other side of the island. Both of them heard the shouts and cries of Outcasts, but no dragon roars.

"Think they're doing all right, bud?"

Toothless snorted. He had supreme confidence in the abilities of his kin. They weren't about to be captured. He ran towards the entrance and blasted the doors. The guards were knocked out, and one who did not fall into unconsciousness suddenly found something hard and leathery in his face.

Hiccup tried to recall what he remembered in his brief stay in the island. Once he found the mass lobby of dungeons, Hiccup found his bearings. Toothless hissed angrily, apparently recalling how he had been chained in one of the cells not too long ago.

"I know. Okay, we're going, we're going," Hiccup reassured his Night Fury. He navigated the tunnels with a bit more certainty, trying to avoid any Outcasts that came their way. There weren't many, due to the diversion Scatty was causing. Anyone who did meet the wrath of Toothless' tail, or worse, fire. Toothless had to admit, it felt good.

They turned a corner, and Hiccup heard voices. Among the voices was the deep baritone of Alvin the Treacherous. Hiccup warned his dragon partner, and they inched slowly and silently as they could towards the entrance of what seemed like a cavernous room. As they neared it, the voices grew louder. Hiccup saw a set of stairs leading down to a meeting room. He dismounted from Toothless and hid against the

wall.

Hiccup risked a peek. There were seven men seated around a rectangular table, and behind each man was a dragon.

'There's a Whispering Death in there!' He thought, and his spirits dropped to rock bottom. The other dragons included a Scauldron, two Monstrous Nightmares, and four Deadly Nadders.

"Most of the fleet has been dispatched in that route you suggested. With the head start they've made, they will arrive soon."

"Good." The huge ugly one with a scruffy brown beard smiled humorlessly. "With Stoick at Greengrass Island, Berk will never know what hit them."

The ugly one turned to the Whispering Death behind him. "And we'll be having our own surprise for that Night Fury and his precious rider, will we?"

The Whispering Death roared. The other dragons followed his lead, and their riders followed through with their sinister evil laugh. Click, Hiccup thought, rolling his eyes. Deep inside, Hiccup wondered grimly what that 'surprise' was. Behind him, Toothless rumbled indignantly, and the Whispering Death below suddenly tensed.

Thinking the other dragon had sensed Toothless, Hiccup scrambled back into the corridor. He tripped over a rock and would have fallen if Toothless hadn't caught him. Hiccup gasped audibly, and at the same moment an Outcast burst through the threshold opposite the one Hiccup had peeked through. His armor was sooty, and he looked positively wild.

"Night Fury attack on Loki's bay!" the Outcast announced. "Our defenses are being overwhelmed!"

All the other officers were silenced. They all stared at their commander, who glowered at them all. The Outcast to the right of the commander broke the silence. "Well? Who was it? Who's the spy?"

The ugly one "Alvin" stood up. "We'll be having a change of plans. Let the Night Fury and Stoick's excuse for a Viking son wreck this island. We're going to claim Berk!"

"But sir," piped up one of the Outcasts. "What about the prisoners?"

Alvin hesitated for a moment. "Leave them be. We have no use for that mute girl and her wild Night Fury."

He raised a fist and uttered a loud battle cry. His followers echoed it. All of them, dragons included, hurried out of the meeting hall, and left a horrified Berk Viking and his Night Fury in their wake.

Alvin

Toothless rumbled, which seemed to snap Hiccup out of his reverie.

"Yeah, bud, we should go," Hiccup said, taking off at a run. When they reached a fork road, Toothless turned left, Hiccup turned right. "Toothless, come here!"

Toothless roared again, urging Hiccup to follow him, and continued on his way. Hiccup sighed and hurried after his dragon. They found themselves at the heart of the dungeons again, and Hiccup was wondering why Toothless led him here.

"What are you up to, bud? We have to get out of here, Evander and Scatty are alone outside," Hiccup reminded his Night Fury. Toothless had other ideas. He sniffed the air tentatively.

"The prisoners!" Hiccup realized.

Locating the scent, Toothless led Hiccup into one of the tunnels.

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Scatty, who evaded being caught in a net by a few centimeters, sent a round of plasma at the rocks, which came tumbling over the burned net-throwing catapults and wooden spikes. The Outcasts yelled and ran for cover.

"What do you know? Still no dragons," Evander observed, as he and Scatty zoomed across the rocky bay fort. Or rather, what was left of it. Most of the Outcasts had already retreated to the inner encampment. Only a select few were vigilantly combing the skies for a sign of the Night Fury. They were lightly armed, and were holding spears and knives at ready. "I think we've caused enough of a diversion here. There's not much to distract. Take us up, girl!"

Scathach ascended, and disappeared into the clouds. Evander flinched as he heard a collection of dragon roars from the other side of the island, where Hiccup was supposed to do his spy work.

"Hiccup!"

And Scatty flew as fast as she could. High above the island but well below the clouds, Evander could just make out a small group of dragons flying in the opposite direction. A worm-like dragon led them, and upon it was a big bearded man who looked like the leader. After the dragons passed by, Scatty descended from the clouds and circled a rock fort.

"Was that the dragon army?" Evander wondered out loud.

Just then, he heard a scream.

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Hiccup ran after his dragon, and was unceremoniously thrown off his feet at the force of Toothless' plasma blast. When he reached the cell Toothless had destroyed, Hiccup found another Night Fury in there. A leather clamp held its mouth shut, and cuffs held together its fore legs and hind legs, the latter of which was also fastened to its tail. Hiccup was painfully reminded of Toothless being in the

same predicament. He had to shake his head several times to rid himself of the memory.

By the time Hiccup had erased the disturbing images from his head, Toothless had already melted off the foreleg cuffs, so Hiccup ran over to help. Hiccup pulled off the leather mouth belt as Toothless worked on the hind leg cuffs. Soon, the other Night Fury was able to stretch out his limbs and wings to enjoy his freedom. He roared at Toothless in gratitude. But when he glowered at Hiccup, Toothless dived in between the other dragon and his rider before the tiny human could get hurt. Toothless didn't care if this was one of his kin, or if the other Night Fury was larger than he was. He was prepared to defend Hiccup, no matter what.

The other Night Fury gave them one last skeptical look, before disappearing into the hallway.

"It's gone to find its rider!" Hiccup cried out, mounting Toothless, who then sped off after the other dragon. The other Night Fury led the way to the grounds, where the last of the Outcasts dragon riders disappeared over the side of the mountain.

"I know where the human prisoners are, bud," Hiccup said, and together they took off. Toothless roared at the other Night Fury, who followed them after a moment's hesitation.

Toothless was mildly irritated. Were Night Furies really that stubborn?

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"Evandeeeeeer!"

"Elene?"

Startled by the scream that drained the color from Evander's face, Scatty searched frantically for the source, and her eyes locked in on an Outcast holding a sword at the girl's throat. Oh, how her blood boiled. The Night Fury landed on the rocky shore. The Viking still had her rider's twin hostage, and Scatty hated that one of her friends was being threatened.

"I need you down from that Night Fury. Now."

Scatty bared her teeth at the offender when she felt Evander dismount. Her rider stepped forward, hands raised as a sign of peace. She knew her rider was livid right now, even if the boy was wearing a serene smile on his face that didn't match his bright dark eyes. That meant he had a plan.

"That's it. Good. Drop your weapons."

Evander clasped his hands to his chest and spread his arms wide. Scatty's eyes widened with recognition and started to move. Evander turned around flamboyantly and covered a respectful distance; he effectively caught the Outcast's full attention. Evander shot his sister's captor a strange look. "I don't have any on me."

As Scathach inched silently out of the captor's line of sight, she held in the urge to pounce on the Outcast and throw him in the sea,

or maybe one of the volcanoes she passed by earlier. Not yet. She had to wait for his signal.

"Lies!"

Evander gasped when the sword was pressed on Elene's throat. The girl, on her part, looked determined not to be frightened by her captor. Evander fought his panic to regain composure. He needed to execute the plan perfectly, or he might become an only child. Just a bit moreâ€|

"You'd know if you had a Night Fury. They don't like people riding them carrying weapons!" Evander snapped, walking casually in a semi-circle. The Outcast kept him in his line of sight, oddly enough. "But no, the ugly Outcast wants to stay on the ground troops! He'd rather take on a helpless lassie than tame a dragon, because that's all he can do."

"Take that back!"

A curious smile crept its way to the boy's impish face. "You're not scared of heights, are you?"

Outraged, the Outcast pressed the sword tighter on Elene's throat.

"Then," Evander said simply, "I hope you won't mind going for a little spin right about..."

The captive seriously doubted her brother now. Behind her, the Outcast seriously doubted the boy's sanity. "What are you talking about?"

The boy pointed to the sky. "â€|now."

The Outcast gasped and shrieked as the cold comfortable ground dropped from below him.

A sword whistled through the air as the Outcast lost his hold on it. Evander managed not to get impaled by it, so now he stood alone by the beach as he waited for Scatty to return. Looking up, he saw a Night Fury circle above him, and after determining it didn't have a red tail fin, he whooped with joy.

"Evander!" Hiccup called just as he and Toothless landed next to him. He indicated the Night Fury circling overhead. "I found that one."

Toothless whacked him with an ear flap. Hiccup cracked a sheepish grin. "Well, Toothless did."

"You guys found Khor!" Evander exclaimed, beside himself with elation.

Khor dropped low and landed regally beside Evander. He subjected Evander into his intense questioning stare. The Nottlander had just opened his mouth to answer when they heard a long sustained scream, followed by a splash. Evander grinned. "She's with Scatty."

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Scathach returned Elene in one piece and very much dry. The girl shrieked with delight when she saw her dragon, and the dragon looked equally happy to see her. Elene dismounted Scatty and leapt onto Khor's welcome back.

"Khor and I are ready to race!" She declared, fastening her harness on her belt. Elene's eyes flashed, challenging her brother, who had mounted Scatty. "I hope you're ready to lose."

"Yeah, thank you for saving my hide from that ugly Outcast, Evander," her twin said, mimicking Elene's feminine voice. He raised a hand, and added in his own voice, "Don't mention it, my lovely sister who put dragon nip in my goblet the other day."

Elene rolled her eyes. "And I ended up doing all your work, Vee-vee!"

Vee-vee? Hiccup chuckled despite himself, and then he decided it was time to go. "Hey, guys, I hate to interrupt your sibling reunion, but we've done all we can here, and we need to go get my father now."

Evander was about to take off with Scatty when he saw Elene stare at Hiccup with widened eyes, then at him.

Hiccup had enough experience with Ruff and Tuff to know that a sibling fight would commence. His instincts were right, and it was worse when he realized that 'he' was the subject of the fight. Elene glared accusingly at him, as if he'd done bloody murder. "Who is this fishbone's excuse for a Night Fury rider?"

"Hey!"

Toothless growled angrily at Elene, to which Khor reacted with a snort and a haughty swish of his tail.

"Easy on the insults, sis! Elene, meet Khor's liberator, Hiccup and Toothless of Berk," Evander said with an uneasy smile. He gestured an arm towards the Berk rider and his dragon. "Berk's new at the dragon training thing, but this guy's got it goodâ€"

But Elene's eyes went wild again. "Oh. No. You. Didn't!"

Evander's smile melted. "Elene, I can explainâ€"

"You broke the oath!"

"I didn't meanâ€" I was dopâ€"

"How could you?!"

"Stop interrupting me!"

"Settle down, you guys," Hiccup tried to amend, raising his hands palms down in a peace gesture. The twins ignored him. It was like trying to calm down a Zippleback fighting with itself. "Okay, this is really helping!"

"You haven't seen Berk, sis," Evander argued. "It's a home to dragons too, and your captors, those crazy Outcasts, want to destroy it! Don't you see? "

It was all Evander could say to try and ease his twin. But Elene shook her head disbelievingly, and her dragon partner seemed to agree with her. "Khor, let's go! Don't let the traitor follow!"

"Elene, wait!"

Scatty and Toothless surged after them, but both had to swerve out of the way in order to evade Khor's deadly blast of plasma. And when Scatty and Toothless managed to recover, Elene and Khor had disappeared into the clouds.

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They had no problem retracing the path towards Stoick. Scatty and Toothless were riding the winds serenely, and both enjoyed the extended flying session. As far as they were concerned, the only thing that would make the trip better was if their riders enjoyed it too.

But Hiccup felt guilty that Evander had chosen to tag along with their 'warn-the-chief' mission right after the Nottlander was deserted by his own twin. After all the trouble they'd been through to rescue them, he and Evander ended up losing her.

"You should go after her," Hiccup told his companion for the umpteenth time.

Elene's words had a profound stinging effect on Evander. His shoulders were hunched, and when he replied, his voice was dry and cracked. "She's right. I am a traitor."

Toothless and Scathach exchanged sad looks, but Hiccup was determined. "Oh, no. I know where this is going. You're thinking, yes, I found my sister, but now she's turned her back on me and would probably set the whole village against me tooâ€"

"Thank you for summing that up!" Evander said sarcastically, throwing his hands up in exasperation.

"â€"but don't let that get to you! Don't you turn your back on them, Evander, and don't ever stop doing the right thing!"

"Oh yeah? And that would be what?"

Hiccup met Evander's eyes with an intensity that burned as bright as a Night Fury's plasma blast at night. "Going after your sister."

Evander averted his eyes. He reached down, patting Scatty gently. The Night Fury crooned. The boy released a breath he'd been holding, and said, "You're awfully sure I'm going to choose the right thing."

"Listen to me!" Hiccup said. "You had the chance to end your fiasco when you sneaked up on me and Toothless. But you didn't."

"I didn't angle Scatty properly!" Evander argued, but he knew it wasn't the reason. So did Scatty, who growled. She didn't like shooting another dragon for the kill, and she and her rider vowed never to do so again.

"I don't believe that!" Hiccup shot back. Night Furies never miss a locked-on target. At least, not on purpose. "The reason I'm still here flying with Toothless is because you chose not to kill another Night Fury and its rider. Not because you can't, but because you won't."

"That's why I want to tell you that you're free to follow her. Toothless and I will manage to find my father by ourselves."

Toothless grunted in agreement. Evander responded to this by staring out into the open sea. He had to hand it to Hiccup; this Berk guy was selfless. Evander felt Hiccup's scrutinizing stare on him, and after a few minutes of soaring through the cold northern air at top Night Fury speed, Evander finally had the guts to meet Hiccup's gaze.

"You're right, Hiccup. I tend to choose the right thing," he told the Berk teen solemnly, who grinned at him bracingly. To Hiccup's surprise, Evander returned a matching grin. "I know we're pressed for time, and those Outcasts do have a thing for Berk, don't they? I won't let them miss me further."

"I don't know. Must be an occupational hazard," Hiccup answered reflexively, then he backtracked. "Did you justâ€"?"

Evander continued to grin, but his eyes told Hiccup, 'Don't make me regret this.'

â€|

Both village chieftains were in a tense discussion during that negotiation day. The Greengrass chief expected a singular boat filled with several men, including Spitelout, one of his good friends. But no, he was sadly mistaken. The Berk chief was all by himself. And he rode a dragon; a Thunderdrum, no less! Everyone had to gape for a moment before one of the readier minds shouted to call for a defense. They had been ready to subdue the dragon, but no one was too ready to attack a dragon with the Berk chief on it. So the Greengrass chief gave Stoick a chance to speak for himself, and now they found themselves sitting in one of the bigger rooms to allow the Thunderdrum in.

"Let me get this straight," the Greengrass chief said. "You showed up on a dragon, asked me to set aside the safety of my village, and now you want to negotiate peace terms with me?"

"Right you are," Stoick rumbled. "Hope you don't feel threatened by Thornado."

"I feel threatened by the very presence of that dragon, Stoick!" The Greengrass chief pointed accusingly at Thornado. The dragon paid him no heed, dismissing the knobbly man as no immediate threat to his and his rider's strength. The armed guards however, made the Thunderdrum more than anxious.

"Berk will never plan on endangering this village!" Stoick boomed. Thornado felt pleased that the guards quivered at his rider's voice. He had chosen splendidly.

"NIGHT FURY!"

"RUN FOR COVER!"

Hearing the yells and shouts from the outside, the Greengrass chief rounded on Chief Stoick. "Explain yourself, Chief of Berk!"

Stoick ran to the nearest window. Zooming towards Greengrass Island was a dark shape he knew so well. He stormed outside with the chief and guards, who kept away from Thornado as much as possible. "That's my son! Let him land."

"Your son tamed a Night Fury?!" The other chief spluttered in surprise. He visualized the scrawny young lad that he saw the last time he was on Berk. To see that boy with the creature of legend was ironic; almost funny.

â€|

Stoick managed to have the human's spiky weapons lowered. Good.

Thornado knew he could protect his rider well enough on his own. However, it felt relieving to have another dragon on the island with him, even if the dragon was the most irritating dragon he'd ever had to share an island with. He had first met Toothless as a wild dragon, and back then he had most embarrassingly had a metal clamp on his mouth. Such travesty to a Thunderdum! And he was seen by a Night Fury no less!

When he had bonded with Stoick, Thornado found out that the Night Fury's rider was his rider's hatchling. Being the mighty but compassionate Thunderdum that he was, Thornado resigned himself to tolerating those two upstarts, especially when he realized how much his rider cared for the young human. With that young hatchling upon his saddled back, Toothless greeted him with an almighty roar that scared off a couple of armed Greengrass Vikings. Thornado felt he could double that number. No, scratch that. Triple. But did he need to prove that? No. So Thornado settled for a low rumble of acknowledgement and idled beside Stoick the Vast.

He heard Toothless' human stammer. How his rider could produce an offspring with a nasally voice like that was a mystery to Thornado, so he chose to focus on the tone his rider's son was using. He also caught some familiar words: 'Outcast' and 'Berk.' Berk. his rider's nest. An Outcast. An enemy of his rider.

Thornado glanced at his human, whose prominent angry scowl grew even more pronounced in response to the Night Fury rider's urgent tone. Even as he felt the chiefly aura his human was radiating, he figured out that an Outcast was planning to do something horrible to his nest. No. Thornado will not let that happen!

Thornado roared, sending a sonic wave to the skies. He locked eyes with the Night Fury, and saw in those big yellow-green eyes that

Toothless agreed with him. Perhaps not about tripling the number of fleeing Vikings, but about defending the nest, and that was good enough for Thornado.

Soon, he and Toothless flew side-by-side in all swiftness to the island they both considered home. It needed defending.

â€|

****A.N.:**** Once again, the beta work was done by ****Ckelst****. What do you think of Elene? How did you find the chapter? Like it? Hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is always welcome.

In the next chapter, we'll see how well Berk performs under a siege, and how dragons will fare in it.

6. Chapter 6 - Attack

Khor knew that Elene was upset. He had seen her grow from the wet-nosed girl of seven, to the headstrong shield maiden who put her duties above everything else. So when Khor was safely within the borders of Nott, he shot upward, heading for the ledges where the other dragons perched. He chose a ledge that was empty, knowing that his rider was not in the best of moods.

The moment her dragon's feet touched the ground, Elene dismounted. She put her arms around him tightly and rested her head upon his great neck. She did not cry. They stayed that way for a while, and then she let go.

A sudden gust of wind told the partners that they were no longer alone.

"Elene! How's the first exploration?" Two big black eyes stared back at Elene, who averted her gaze and stepped to the edge. "Anything good?"

Elene looked down on the entire village of Nott below them; its people bustling in the forum, lounging in the baths, or else training at the arena. The occasional dark shape of a Night Fury darted here and there. It was her home, and it was her duty to protect it. In the future, it will be her duty to lead it with her twin brother.

Berk's new at the dragon training thing, but this guy's got it good!

Elene scowled. Great. Now her twin's voice was stuck in her head. She forced it out of her mind and said, "Peachy. Nothing happened. Isn't it your turn to patrol the southwest boundaries?"

"Huh. You smell funny," Diana said, who had joined Elene at the edge of their perch. "You're supposed to check the situation on the Berserkers. Why do you smell like you've been with the Outcasts? And where's your twin?"

It's a home to dragons too!

As Evander's voice echoed in her head, her mind's eye replayed a scene long ago, where she and her brother sat around a man in the scaled armor and a purple cape. She was bored to death just by listening to this man prattle on about the law. She did not understand why there was a need to know how everything works in Nott when they could see it for themselves outside their classes. And so she asked. The man had told her something she would never forget.

The Code of Nott is there to protect, to keep the dragons safe. And it's there to keep you and your brother safe too.

"I'll get him, but I'm making sure you get to your post first," Elene answered shortly.

Diana saluted. "Yes, commander."

With Diana and her Night Fury, Elene and Khor flew over the sea, which was startlingly peaceful, unlike the whirlpool that was Elene's mind. Diana led her dragon to the west, while Elene continued south.

The dragon cast her a brief searching look. Her brooding expression was reflected in the dragon's eyes, much to Elene's surprise.

_Don't you see? _I have no idea who said this. She remembered her twin beseeching her. He had asked her to believe in him, that he was doing something right which meant throwing all they had learned down the abyss and betraying the legion.

Elene gasped, and shook her head. No, she told herself. She was not betraying the legion. Technically, she had assigned herself a retrieval mission. She was doing this because she needed her brother in overseeing the elite team, and eventually, Nott. It would be their duty to protect their people, and the Night Fury nest.

"Khor?"

Her scowl turned into a resigned frown as she ran a hand through her short, windswept hair in frustration. Her fingers felt the circlet around her head that marked her as the successor to her parents, and it felt heavier than ever. Underneath her, Khor let out a deep rumble.

"I know. We'll have to make sure he doesn't hurt himself," Elene said through gritted teeth.

â€|

Tension filled the village of Berk. Wooden spikes were strewn in strategic locations to bottleneck any oncoming foe from the harbour. The fish trays were once again filled with timber, and ready to be lit. The catapults were oiled and loaded. Swords, axes, hatchets, spears and daggers were sharpened.

Dragons did not like sharp metals. It scared them. Those had claimed the life of thousands of their kind, and they weren't at all inclined to like it. Had they gone too far in treating Berk as a nest, that the Vikings were now driving them away? But those who had bonded with humans were still welcome, and their riders were treating them well.

Why were their humans taking up arms again?

The long earthquake last night was the last straw. Berk was no longer safe as a nest. Led by one of Hookfang's kin, the other non-bonded dragons took to the skies. As they flew, they saw ships sailing in loose formation towards Berk, and they all agreed that leaving the village was all for the best. The seafarers were armed to the teeth, and the dragons had no desire to be on the receiving end of their painful blows.

â€

"It's like dragon raids are here again," Fishlegs heard one of the children tell Gothi during dinner. It was agreed that the children were to be left under Gothi's supervision, and they were prepared to be evacuated at a moment's notice with the help of Mulch and Bucket. Fishlegs had no qualms with this, except for that one time when Bucket unknowingly led the Outcasts to capture the children.

In the sullen great hall, Fishlegs caught Astrid's eye; she waved at him from her table, where Snotlout sat across from her.

"Hey, Fishlegs! Did Meatlug give you the cold shoulder?" Snotlout sneered at Fishlegs when the latter wandered over and sat beside Snotlout.

"I thought Berk would have, you know, enjoyed a bit more time of peace after the dragon war ended," Fishlegs said mournfully.

"That takes all the fun out of being a Viking," Snotlout protested.

"Except maybe dragon training," Fishlegs added glumly before wolfing down his roasted chicken.

Astrid banged her mug on the table, causing the two boys to look at her. "Guys, we're Vikings! We're rough and tough!"

Ruff and Tuff scrambled to their table, and took the seats beside Astrid.

Tuff leaned with one elbow on the table. "Somebody call us?"

"Some earthquake we went through last night," Ruff said. "No wonder the other dragons flew off."

"Yeah," her twin agreed. "What's up with that?"

"We don't know." Astrid sighed. She eyed each of her friends, lingering on each pair of eyes for a few moments. "We'll get through this. Together, like Hiccup said."

If Astrid had intended to lift up the spirits of her friends, she failed. At the mention of their absentee leader who was away to warn the chief, a looming silence fell over the group. Even Fishlegs put down his chicken. Slowly, one by one, they stood up and left the hall to go home.

"Shouldn't he be back with the chief by now?" Ruff wondered. She and Astrid led the way down the steps. Two Nadders flew in the distance;

Astrid had assigned shifts to the other riders to patrol the island day and night. It was Snotlout's and Fishlegs' duty last night, and their dragons enjoyed a fitful sleep that day, so only Stormfly, Barf and Belch were outside to greet them at the bottom of the steps.

Snotlout punched his fist, as his hair was swept by a sudden burst of wind. It was cold, but Snotlout didn't flinch from the cold. You didn't survive into your teen years on Berk without developing hypothermic endurance. "I knew it! That good for nothing Dragon nip wimp has kidnapped Hiccup! I'm going to throw him in a pit of Fireworms!"

An indignant rumble came from behind him, followed by, "Throw me in a pit of what?"

Snotlout spread his arms wide and put on a toothy smile. "Dragon nip boy! I knew you'd come back!"

â€|

A warm stew and a barrage of questions later, Evander found himself reassuring the rest of Hiccup's friends that the chief and his son were both well on their way home, and that Berk should prepare to defend itself as needed until the chief arrived. Snotlout relayed this to his father, Spitelout, who was Stoick's second-in-command.

"There's something else you're not telling us," Astrid said, eyeing Evander from across the table. "Isn't there?"

"Yeah, what happened? Why didn't Hiccup go back with you?" Fishlegs added.

"In a dragon's egg? (1) We went to Outcast Island!"

"You went to Outcast Island?!" The twins blurted out.

Evander held up his hands in defense. "We both agreed to it. And for good reason. The enemy ships are arriving earlier, and this Alvin guy somehow bonded with a Whispering Death. Hiccup figured that we should split up so we can both warn the chief and the village. Toothless tracked Stoick, and Scatty flew here in record time because Scatty's the fastest Night Fury I've ever met."

Scatty shot a tiny ball of plasma into the air and rumbled in satisfaction. It detonated several feet above their heads, lighting up the sullen room in one brief flash of fire. Evander shot her a grin, and tossed her his fish, which went straight down her throat.

"So," Fishlegs said. "When you said 'earlier,' when do you think the Outcasts are arriving?"

As if on cue, one of the patrol riders burst into the Great Hall. She looked quite winded, and soot covered one side of her body. "The Outcasts are here!"

Spitelout took charge. "All Vikings, to your stations! Grab your sword and shield! Man the catapults! We won't let them take our

land!"

"But what about the chief?" A Viking asked.

Spitelout gave everyone in the room a hardened look. "We'll hold the village 'til he gets here. Now, go!"

The older fighters stormed outside the Great Hall. Astrid and the others stood to follow them, but Evander held them back. "Wait! Before we scatter ourselves, Hiccup needs you guys to do something."

"We don't take orders from you!" Snotlout protested, folding his arms.

Astrid swatted him. "Ignore him, and let's hear it."

Evander cleared his throat. "Here's what Hiccup and I suggestâ€|"

â€|

Astrid had divided the dragon riders of Berk into respective groups of three, and assigned them at strategic points in the village to provide air support to the ground troops. The oncoming Outcasts would have to face two Zipplebacks that were at the harbour and ready to intoxicate the oncoming attackers with poisonous gas. If they weren't dizzy enough after that, they'll be greeted by the Monstrous Nightmares that now settled on the cliff face and by the catapults. Most of the Nadders and Gronckles were at the village proper. They perched on empty houses and prepared to take on those who would make it past the front lines.

'This is a battle. A real battle!' Astrid reminded herself. Astrid took one look at their small advance group, designed to scatter the oncoming forces and staunch the flow of opponents that reached Berk. She was not alone. 'Keep your cool, and stick to the plan.'

Seeing the fleet of Outcast ships arranged in four groups of five, Astrid had to shake off her second thoughts on keeping the most of the riders on Berk. She told herself that in case the advance team went down, at least Berk would still have a handful of skilled riders to help defend the island.

She saw Evander raise a fist and direct it to the sea below them.

"No turning back," she muttered.

â€|

Stormfly, Hookfang and Scatty dived towards the leftmost flank with Scatty at the center. The Outcasts opened fire with stone catapults in an attempt to shoot them down. Stormfly dodged one rock, looped over another, and sent a volley of poisonous spines to pin several crew members to the wooden floor. Hookfang veered off course, then dove into the water twenty feet away from the group. Scatty loosed a blast before shooting upwards again. It hit the water at the center of the group, splashing water over all the ships, and setting those nearest ablaze. Hookfang broke the surface of the sea at the center

of the group of ships, and let out a stream of fire.

When the three dragons and their riders were done, all the Outcasts from that fleet were swimming frantically to the neighboring ships.

Barf, Belch, and Meatlug weren't so lucky.

Spreading green gas all around, Barf and Belch circled the rightmost flank. The ships were assembled more tightly, and Meatlug had trouble shooting the masts of the ships at the center. The Outcasts opened fire at them. Meatlug was enjoying the rock projectiles the Outcasts were throwing at her. Granite. Not her favorite these days, but it sure tickled her taste buds!

Belch opened his mouth to ignite the flame, but was forced to dodge a jet of water from the sea. Barf and Belch screeched at the Scauldron that rose threateningly out of the water. It moved between them and the ships, and hissed at the Zippleback angrily. The Scauldron and the Zippleback screeched loudly at each other, fangs dripping with venom.

Barf and Belch gave one final hiss and flew off. Another jet of water later and Meatlug followed suit.

â€|

"What happened to you guys?" Evander asked when they and their dragons met high above the remaining ships that had drifted to Berk, where the Hooligans were more than ready for them. He knew they wouldn't have enough time to deal with all the Outcast ships, but he preferred less to more when it came to opponents.

"Barf and Belch had a row with a Scauldron," Ruffnut told the group. She and Tuffnut grinned at Evander. "It was awesome!"

"Erâ€| You wouldn't have any Blue Oleanders now, would you?" Evander asked, suddenly finding his flight suit interesting. He tried not to be deterred by Astrid's ominous glare as she and Stormfly flew beside him; she looked like she wanted to make an axe-throwing target out of him. He had the nerve to look sorry, but for Astrid, this wasn't cutting it.

Over the battle cries that carried over from the island and the ships, Astrid yelled, "You didn't say anything about a Scauldron! You only said Alvin would be riding a Whispering Death!"

"Where is he?" Snotlout ground his teeth as he set his eyes on the ships. "I want to bash Alvin's ugly face for all he's done to Berk. Now he's not brave enough to show himself and his worm of a dragon?"

"I wouldn't be surprised that he's not up and about yet," Fishlegs said matter-of-factly. Meatlug buzzed beside Evander, Astrid, Stormfly and Scatty. "The Dragon Manual says that a Whispering Death is rarely seen in broad daylight, and that it likes to burrow underground causing earthâ€|."

"Has Berk experienced any sort of tremor recently?" Evander asked.

Fishlegs' face fell. "Uh-oh."

"That's a yes," Evander said, feeling like his spirit was plunged into the cold, dark depths of Tartarus. (2)

"Everybody back to Berk!" Astrid called out. As the others obliged, Astrid led Stormfly to fly close to Evander and Scatty. The Night Fury rumbled indignantly, but didn't fly off. "I have my eyes on you, Nottlander. You better not mess with our defenses. I'll make sure you're sorry if you do."

"I'm not going to," Evander said. She and Evander flew in a straight line towards Berk, but as they neared the shipsâ€

Their formation was blasted apart by a stream of scorching water from below. Stormfly screeched and flew away, but Scatty zoomed in for a closer inspection. Scatty descended; she stayed just out of the Scauldron's reach, but within sight of the other dragon. She taunted the Scauldron and flew in fancy curves, dives and spins. The Night Fury growled and grunted, sending the Scauldron to a frenzy.

"What is wrong with you?!" one of the Outcasts yelled. The Scauldron continued to spout poisonous venom and send out rounds of hot water at the annoying Night Fury. "You stupid dragon! We're here to claim Berk, not chat with other dragons! You're supposed to guard the ships! AGH!"

A volley of spines incapacitated the rest of the crew. One more ship down.

"You want to claim Berk?" Astrid had pulled her Nadder back into the fray. She and Stormfly zoomed past the ship, and dodged flaming projectiles aimed for them. "You'll have to go through us!"

Stormfly dove on the group of warships, and shot a hole through the hull of a longship. The nearby Outcast ship came to the rescue, and Astrid heard the '_thwang_' of bowstrings.

Arrows whistled past Astrid. One bounced off Stormfly's hide, and another grazed Astrid's arm. The wound stung, and Astrid hoped the arrowheads weren't poisoned. Stormfly heard her rider's gasp, and sensed her rider's pain. The Deadly Nadder let out a concerned squawk, earning a quick pat from Astrid. "I'll be okay, girl! Let's go higher."

Stormfly worked her wings and flew high above the ships where no flying rocks or arrows could hit them. She circled over the wreckage, giving Astrid a dragon's eye view of the battle erupting below them. She saw her tribe meeting their opponents head-on. She heard the war cries from both sides, and the clashing of metal. The battle had begun.

â€|

The rest of the team had barely touched town on Berk when the first ship's crews were starting on the first line of defense. The ship catapults were now opening fire, and the flaming projectiles set several houses on fire. One of the burning stones destroyed the wooden spikes used by Berk to funnel the oncoming Outcasts, and the

enemies of Berk spilled into the village where defenders welcomed them with swords, axes, shields, and the occasional fire-breathing dragon.

"Fire!" Snoutlout yelled. Hookfang reared.

"Wait! We can't just fire!" Fishlegs told his team mates. He indicated the other riders diving in on their enemies, and the rest of the Berk Vikings. "We might hit our allies!"

Snotlout scowled. "Then what do we do? Watch our friends get skewered and grilled?"

Ruff and Tuff grinned at each other. As Barf and Belch took off again, Tuff called out to the others, "We have a plan. ATTACK!"

"Sounds good to me!" Snotlout agreed, and Hookfang followed the Zippleback into the air to join the rest of the dragon riders in defending Berk.

"Ummâ€¦. I'd rather not take you fighting, Meatlug," Fishlegs admitted, and his Gronckle rumbled. Meatlug turned sharply, or as sharp as a Gronckle could, and dodged an oncoming net. It hit one of Fishlegs' Gronckle buddies and allowing a number of attackers to close in. "WHOA!"

Fishlegs would have taken Meatlug to help the other Gronckle, but his attackers weren't done with him just yet.

"Get that Gronckle!" the leader of the group of Outcasts yelled. His minions quickly readied another net and readied to throw it on Meatlug.

Fishlegs started. Was he scared? A little bit. No, more than a little bit. Did he want to fight? He grew up as a Viking, and he certainly knew how to fight. He had been raised for warfare, and only recently did he realize that people fight when there is conflict, but people defend when there is something or someone to protect. Only now did Fishlegs embrace the true meaning of protection. He knew that Meatlug would trust him with her life, and he would do the same.

Fishlegs narrowed his eyes. No one was going to hurt him or his dragon.

â€¦

Evander thought that Scatty was doing great in distracting the Scauldron. With that out of the way, Astrid and Stormfly would have a clearer shot at the Outcast ships. He was worried that the Scauldron's trainer would call for its attention; Scatty wasn't. Annoying other Night Furies, especially those larger than her, was one of her talents, and the unwilling Khor was her recurring test subject. Although Scatty's goal was not to irritate a certain water dragon, the match had completely taken the Scauldron's attention. Scatty made sure she hovered between Berk and the Scauldron when she hissed and spat out small warning shots of plasma.

He saw Astrid and Stormfly rise from the group of ships.

"Scatty, escape pattern Romulus," Evander called. The Scauldron spouted another jet of hot water that missed him by a head. "SCATTY, DO IT NOW!"

Scatty dove, her wings whistling through the air as she weaved through the rocks that came her way. She fired; it exploded right at the center of the long ship carrying the nasty-looking catapult. She perched on the stern of another long ship, and roared to make her presence known. The Outcasts turned on them with the spears and axes ready for the throw.

"Steady, girl," Evander told Scatty. His eyes swept their surroundings and took in their situation. In his peripheral vision, he saw the Scauldron darting towards them from behind his dragon. Its long serpentine neck was poised high in the air, and it readied to strike Evander and Scatty with its venomous fangs. On deck, the Outcasts were leering at them with all the menace they could muster, to which Evander responded with a cheeky grin. "Don't mind us. We're just passing by."

It happened so quickly. Evander pulled back on the handle, the Scauldron struck, the Outcasts attacked. The water dragon clamped its jaws shut over thin air, where the Night Fury was perched mere seconds before, and right on the Outcasts' target. Weaving through arrows, spears and rocks, Scatty flapped her wings hard in a vertical ascent and left the Scauldron crying in pain as it sank back into the sea with several axes and spears piercing its neck.

When Scatty levelled and circled well beyond the Scauldron's reach and the aim of the warriors below, they saw that it had receded into the sea, but stayed in the shallow waters. They could see its blue-green bulk lurking just beneath the ships.

"Evander!" Astrid and Stormfly flew beside them. "These ships won't be going anywhere now."

"Neither will our Scauldron friend." Evander grinned. "You and Stormfly did great with the whole spine shot thing and the dive attack! I thought you guys were new in dragon riding?"

Astrid grinned back at him. "We're not complete rookies, you know."

A loud explosion put their thoughts back into battle. Barf and Belch rose out of the smoke that smothered the port.

"We have to get back to the village. Now," Astrid decided, wiping sweat from her brow. She did not feel good at all, but the battle wasn't over yet.

"You're right," Evander said, surveying the wreckage. "We've done what we can here."

But when Scatty and Stormfly turned towards the island, they saw the village crumble before their eyes.

"Mighty Pluto," Evander breathed out.

â€|

When Snotlout heard the rumbling noise, he had been locked in combat with an Outcast whose companions had knocked him off Hookfang. The ground shook, throwing Snotlout off balance. The Outcast brought down his spear on Snotlout, who had managed to put his shield in front of him for protection.

"What's the matter?" The Outcast leered at him. "Scared of an Outcast?"

Snotlout saw something big, long and red swipe the offending Outcast off him and into a stack of barrels which collapsed upon impact. With the spear still embedded in his shield, Snotlout got up to see Hookfang being restrained by three other Outcasts with a set of ropes that bound the Monstrous Nightmare's wings. The sudden binding hurt Hookfang, and grounded him. Out of instinct, Snotlout ran at one of the rope handlers, and barrelled right into him. They crashed and rolled down the hill, just as Hookfang's hide blazed.

In the confusion that ensued, Snotlout was surprised he survived with a few cuts and grazes and an Outcast in his private space. Disgusted, he made to shove his quarry off of him before the Outcast could do him harm.

A long scarlet jaw plucked the Outcast off Snotlout and tossed it to a net that was about to capture a Nadder and its rider. The Outcast sailed towards the cluster of other Outcasts, scattering them and allowing the group of Berk riders to round them up and keep them trapped in the net.

"Yeah, Hookfang!" Snotlout cheered, punching the air with a fist. Hookfang bumped his nose to his rider's fist.

The ground shook again, more violently this time. Snotlout hopped onto Hookfang's neck, and reached for the comfort of the dragon's horns. Hookfang took off. "What was that?!"

Snotlout ducked; a rock soared past his head. When he looked back at Berk, the village was in ruins.

* * *

><p>A.N.: Whew. Two more chapters left in story arc 1! What do you think of this chapter? Like it? Hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is very much appreciated. Beta work by Ckelst.

In the next chapter, Hiccup and Stoick arrive in time to help the Hairy Hooligans rise out of the ruins in 'Rivalry.'

(1) In a dragon's egg " the Nottlander version of the idiom, 'in a nutshell'

(2) Tartarus " in Roman and Greek mythology, the deepest and darkest abyss in the Underworld/Hades where the Titans are said to be kept prisoners

7. Chapter 7 - Rivalry

Hiccup couldn't believe how well his mission was going. Sure, he

barely escaped capture and lost his companion along the way, but he'd achieved more than he aimed for. He had gained information on Berk's attackers and sent his companion back to the village to forewarn the Hooligans. He was also able to track down his father, who now flew with him back to Berk after Hiccup filled him in on the latest events. Everything was going smoothly, and if Hiccup knew his luck, he would bet his inventions that something wrong would hit him in the face, sooner and not later.

So when a fire ball shot between Thornado and Toothless and detonated several feet away, Hiccup knew his luck was up.

Thornado's right wingtip was singed when the round of plasma whizzed past. Injured, the Thunderdrum opted to return to its home turf, the sea. Thornado swam in agitated circles with the bad wing held aloft. It took an entire minute trying to pacify Thornado, who remained in the water no matter what his rider did. With a hand stretched in Hiccup's general direction, Stoick called for his son from their spot on the seawater. He couldn't do much more, and Stoick didn't like it.

Meanwhile, Hiccup and Toothless had their own problems. Toothless had veered to the right fast enough to avoid the blast. When they saw Thornado go down to the sea, Toothless attempted to dive for Stoick. The Night Fury had just folded his wings when something big collided with Toothless in mid-air. Toothless wrestled with the thing and they spun out of control, as they pelted towards the sea below them. The world was a blur to Hiccup, and he could only keep himself from being separated from Toothless by his death grip on the saddle. Finally, everything went still. Dazed, Hiccup looked around to see where the big thing went, and felt a hot fishy breath down his nape. Hiccup turned, and found another Night Fury's nose an inch from his.

"AH!" Hiccup yelled in shock, leaning back on his saddle as far as his harness would allow. The other dragon had latched onto Toothless' wing joints using all four legs, rendering Toothless unable to control flight and unable to fight without injuring his wings. Toothless roared at his assailant, and the assailant roared back. Hiccup, who happened to be in between them, covered his ears.

When the roars subsided into low ominous growls, Hiccup turned to the rider astride the other Night Fury's back. The girl grinned at him humorlessly. "Hello, Fishbone."

"Let my dragon go, Elene!" Toothless echoed his rider's sentiments with a growl.

"You're deluded if you think I'm going to do that," she answered coolly. "Now, tell me where Vee-vee is, Outlander."

"Can't your dragon track him?" Hiccup asked, motioning to the great big head between them. Elene's expression twisted for the briefest moment, and Hiccup knew he asked the wrong question.

"Just tell me where my brother is!" Elene shrieked, and for moment, Hiccup thought she might order her dragon to do something horrible. One look at Khor told Hiccup that the dragon definitely wanted to, and for a brief moment, Hiccup feared for Toothless.

"Okay, okay! No tracking!" Hiccup cried out, part of him wondering

why such a mighty-looking Night Fury couldn't track like Evander said Night Furies could. Hiccup forced himself to think, which was harder than you would imagine. He wouldn't ask Toothless to retaliate with a tail whack or two; it would only aggravate the other Night Fury, or worse, its rider. He could wait for his dad to find them, and Thornado would do a sonic blast that would surely let Toothless escape. But it wouldn't stop the other rider from pursuing them, and Hiccup had a sneaking feeling that Evander's twin was not as merciful as Evander was. He thought Elene had the aura of a cold-blooded soldier. On the last time he was in a place where people wouldn't think twice to kill, Hiccup was snooping around for information, which was something he did have to bargain with. Then the option occurred to him.

"All right, I'll tell you where he is," Hiccup said, plastering a nervous smile on his face. What better way to wriggle out of a tight spot by giving the captor what she wanted? Inwardly, Hiccup hated using this strategy taught to him by Mildew, but with Toothless on the line, Hiccup was prepared to do anything.

Elene was noticeably calmer after that. She even sent another humorless smile his way. "That wasn't so hard, was it? Cough up, Fishbone, you and your dragon don't have all night."

"I'll tell you where he is," Hiccup repeated. Both Khor and Elene eyed him skeptically, but Hiccup stood his ground. "But not until you release Toothless."

Elene started. "Toothless?"

"I'm not telling you anything unless you release my Night Fury," Hiccup decided. On cue, Toothless growled indignantly from below. "You can threaten me all you want, Elene, but you're a Nottlander. You're honor bound to respect Night Furies."

"Outlanders," Elene scoffed. "You're not in a position to say that. I'm in control here. And you think I'm bluffing?"

"Yes," Hiccup said firmly, meeting her eyes squarely. "Evander told me. Killing, or even just injuring a Night Fury is sufficient grounds for disgraceful execution."

Hiccup knew he hit home when she broke the stare and she patted Khor's great neck. "What do you think, Khor?"

The dragon snorted. Elene sighed. "All right. I hate to admit it, but you're right. We're at a stalemate. So here's what Khor and I will do. Khor will release—uh, Toothless, and you will be leading me to Evander. We'll follow closely. Deal?"

"Deal."

Khor released and followed Toothless, who shot out into the night. But they weren't heading to Berk just yet, and Elene didn't need to know that.

Finding Stoick again wasn't so hard. Hiccup supposed that his father having a human voice comparable to a Thunderdrum's helped. Elene was so stunned to see the chief on a Thunderdrum, she forgot her prejudice against Outlanders. Hiccup made a hasty introduction,

during which Elene used the time to compose herself and hope that Hiccup didn't see her immense surprise. But Hiccup did. And Hiccup vowed to ask about it when things lay low.

Hiccup listened in Stoick and Elene as they forged a deal and cross-checked information on Berk's current condition. The Nottlander made sure that Stoick had a firm grasp of her objectives and her village's absolute secrecy policy that put Berk on the hot list for destruction, something that Hiccup seconded.

"Not unless that Whispering Death rider wipes it out first," Elene said grimly. "If my guesses are as good as a Night Fury's aim, then Berk will have been destroyed by now."

Stoick refused to believe this.

"Yer underestimating Berk, lass," Stoick told her. He didn't see his son's face grow even paler under the moonlight. "We've been fighting off dragons for generations. My tribe will be able to hold the village against the Outcasts."

Elene cast him a stormy look. "An occupational hazard, huh? I wish I could say that with more confidence for the Vikings who built wooden houses and fought fire-breathing creatures on a regular basis. But that's beside the point.

"The Outcast leader is not as deranged as the new Berserker leader I've heard of, but he's crazy about riding dragons and revenge on Berk. His dragon is a Whispering Death, and that dragon had a big grudge on Night Furies. If Khor wasn't the best fighter I've seen, I wouldn't be here right now." She looked at Hiccup pointedly. "Has your Night Fury battled a Whispering Death before? On Berk?"

Hiccup nodded mutely. The question sent shock waves through him, and he had a brief vision of stepping off a cliff as he watched Toothless take on a Whispering Death. But that vision was snuffed out by another grim possibility.

"What is it, son?" Stoick asked urgently.

"Alvin's surprise," Hiccup said, realizing the meaning of the Outcast's words. He explained this to them, and Stoick was suddenly struck with another wave of gut-wrenching worry for his homeland which he fought to control.

"Less talk, more flying!" Stoick declared, patting Thornado's head to get his dragon's attention. As an afterthought, he added, "And swimming."

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Evander and Astrid directed their dragons towards the academy, where they decided to land. Snotlout and Hookfang, along with the rest of the Berk riders, joined them. Each dragon carried one or two survivors plucked from harm's way. Below, the ground Vikings who found stable land before the incident trooped towards the academy with Spitelout leading them. And though these Vikings were as rough as a dragon's hide, seeing their home destroyed in a matter of minutes left them at a loss.

The main part of the village, which included the town plaza, the armory, the food stock and several residential houses, was reduced to wooden and earthen rubble. A chunk of the cliff fell into the sea and took an otherwise fully functional catapult with it. Two Nadder riders swooped in to rescue those who had fallen with the catapult.

Scatty deposited her passenger Viking neatly on the ground. Evander coaxed her into the arena where Stormfly allowed her rider to dismount. He hopped down from the saddle, and his arms hung limp at his sides. "Alvin's dragon must have eaten the foundation and collapsed the tunnels. We're too late."

"No." Astrid refused to believe that the battle was over. "We can still fight. We're going to find Alvin, and we're going to give him what he deserves."

"All right, I'm with you," Evander said, looking around the riders that dotted the arena. "Erâ€¦ I'd suggest you deal with them first."

"What?" Astrid asked, a hand clamped to her forehead.

"You're Hiccup's second, right?" Evander jerked his head to the collection of Vikings and dragons all around them. Spitelout was already managing the ground troops, but the riders were haphazardly strewn across the arena. "As the second, you should support the commander as best as you can. He'll count on you to keep Berk's riders in check."

Astrid flushed at the sudden reminder of her responsibility. She remembered her first rider meeting well. She was intimidated by all the adults looking down on her. It felt odd that a teen was assigned to give orders over the older riders, and it felt even odder and heavier now that they were in the middle of a real battle, and that she was injured. But she couldn't let her people down; they looked to her as their leader in Hiccup's absence, and it would not do for her to breakdown now.

She steeled herself and asked the riders to gather around her. After hearing the reports from the teams on their side of the battle, Astrid found out that they had sustained heavy losses. A Monstrous Nightmare and a Zippleback were downed by bolas and well-placed rocks, while several Nadders and Gronckles had been captured. Others were missing from the destruction caused by the tunnel collapse.

"All right," Astrid said, putting a hand on Stormfly for support. "Snotlout, you're on rescue. Take a team with you and look for other survivors. Watch out for stray Outcasts."

"You got it!" Snotlout winked at her. He flew off with Hookfang and several other riders before Astrid could respond.

Astrid looked up at the twins on their Zippleback. "Ruff, Tuff, you're on patrol. Any sign of the Outcasts, light some gas."

"Yeah!" Ruff whooped and banged her helmet against her twin. Moments later, Barf and Belch perched precariously on the metal web above the arena. Occasionally, a Nadder rider would swoop in to deposit a

survivor, or a prisoner, the latter of which was thrown in the arena's dragon cages.

"Fishlegs," Astrid continued, "I need you toâ€"

She paused when she couldn't find the burly young Viking and his Gronckle. Anxious, she looked around the remaining riders, who returned sullen stares to her. "Where's Fishlegs?"

Snotlout and Hookfang swooped inside the arena at that moment. "Snotlout, have you found Fishlegs?"

"Meatlug probably dozed off somewhere," Snotlout replied casually as Hookfang set down another Hooligan. "They'll be back."

"Keep searching!" Astrid called, and Hookfang disappeared with Snotlout into the night once more.

"What are the rest of us going to do, Astrid?" asked a Nadder rider covered with soot.

Astrid turned to the other riders. "Gronckle riders, you can take the first shift of aerial patrol. Let Ruff and Tuff know about anything suspicious. The rest of you, tend to your dragons while you can, and take the next shift of patrol to let the Gronckles rest."

The meeting was dismissed when Spitelout demanded a report from Astrid.

"Yeh sure yeh don't want anything fer tha'?" Spitelout nodded to her wound. Astrid waved him off and proceeded to report everything from the aerial strike to their theory on how Berk was suddenly crumbled. Spitelout was not amused to learn that Evander failed to tell him about Alvin's dragon. He turned on the boy who was sulking in the background, but Astrid moved between them before Evander could do anything.

"As a dragon rider, sir, Evander is under my team. I can attest to his loyalty to Berk in this battle," she said, blinking spots out of her eyes. The next thing she knew was darkness and a vague tingling sensation where her arrow wound would have been.

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Hiccup distracted himself from worrying by observing how Elene and Khor flew. Like Evander, Elene flew with practiced ease, and the dragon seemed to know what his rider was thinking. When Khor adjusted to the wind currents, Elene would move in unison with her Night Fury to remain in course. Toothless seemed to catch on what Hiccup was doing, and flew close to the Nottlanders.

Khor spared them a glance, and flapped to gain altitude and to keep a comfortable distance away from the smaller Night Fury. Toothless joined Khor after a few short seconds. Khor went into a shallow dive. When Khor saw Toothless behind him, he zoomed upwards and pulled into a tight loop. Determined, Toothless followed Khor's movements with respectable accuracy for a Night Fury with a prosthetic tail fin. Soon, the two Night Furies flew wingtip-to-wingtip.

"Toothless," Hiccup scolded. Toothless growled, and Hiccup smiled

despite himself. "Nice work, bud."

"Khor, don't tire yourself," Elene chided, rubbing Khor's neck soothingly. "I'm sure Toothless just wants to check out your awesome flying skills and maybe copy a few moves." She smirked and added, "Like they could."

"Hey!" came Hiccup's indignant shout.

"A Night Fury might have chosen you to be a human partner, but you're still a jealous Outlander to me," Elene said coolly.

Khor huffed and tolerated Toothless' efforts in keeping up with him. That is to say, Khor and Toothless ended up racing towards Berk. With Khor not at his best condition and Toothless flying with an artificial tail, it made for a good competition. Despite his fatigue, Khor clearly had a rival, and he knew it even if he reached the island first with a few seconds to spare.

"VICTORY!" Elene cried out.

She turned to Hiccup and Toothless, but when she followed Hiccup's gaze, all traces of competitiveness were snuffed out of her. They landed up on the cliffs overlooking Berk, or what was left of Berk. Stoick caught up with them up in the cliffs some time after, with Stoick grunting about some stray Scauldron blocking the direct path towards the harbour.

"I guess we'll need new houses again," Hiccup said feebly, his tone being an ominous omen to Stoick, who leaned over the edge. Hiccup and Stoick stare in silent horror at their once thriving village.

"Where are all the fighters?" Elene wondered, squinting at what she could see.

"The Outcasts are probably nearby," Stoick answered. "Some of them will retreat into the woods or in the ships out in the sea. As for my menâ€¦"

"There!" Hiccup pointed towards the academy, which had remained intact and was now brightly lit. Hiccup wondered idly if the welcoming Zippleback was paying attention to its surroundings or busy snapping at each other's heads. He made to lead Toothless there, but Stoick stopped him with a raised hand.

"Son, I need ye to scout the island," Stoick said. "Elene, go with him. That way, we'll lessen your contact with Berk. If ye find anything, send up a fire ball nice and bright in the sky. We'll meet at the academy."

With a temporarily grounded dragon, Stoick was forced to make his way down to the arena through the ruins on foot. When he and Thornado drew near, Belch ignited Barf's gas and caused everyone in the arena to go on high alert. Stoick stomped inside. His imperious presence stunned the entire tribe into silence. Stoick stared deep into his tribesmen's eyes, and felt a wave of dread wash over him. He fought against it. And he won. Stoick punched a fist in the air. The entire arena broke out into a cacophony of war cries that meant one thing: their leader had returned.

High above, two Night Furies and their riders looked over the village from the cliffs.

"Elene," Hiccup began, "You told me you wanted to find your brother, but you ended up trading information with us and helping Berk. I need to know why you're doing this."

"You need my assurance that I won't betray you to the Outcasts? Okay, fair enough," Elene said, taking out a dagger from a pack attached to the saddle. She attached the sheath to the waist band of her flight suit. "I've already told your father, and I'll tell you again. I want my second-in-command. When I found that Vee-vee had tangled himself with you Hooligans, I realized that to get my brother back, I have to deal with the consequences of all this. And I'll do just that."

"I don't know how much my twin has told you, but I will tell you this. Nottlanders take honor and integrity seriously. I don't intend to go back on my word."

"You're really extra sure?" Hiccup asked skeptically. She stared back with a draconian ferocity that mirrored Khor's. And Hiccup mumbled, "Thanks."

"I'm not doing it for Berk!" Elene protested, but something in Hiccup's eyes told her that he already knew that.

"I just needed to hear it from you," Hiccup said, "'cause, it's kinda hard to ride into battle with a dragon who thinks my own dragon is his rival, and with someone who's friendly enough to call me 'fishbone' and a 'jealous Outlander,' y'know?"

"Fine." Elene sighed. "Let's just get this over with."

Elene and Khor zoomed towards the forest. As Toothless flew over Berk, Hiccup noticed something.

"Bud, can you land there?"

Once they were on the ground, Hiccup examined a tunnel that remained intact after the collapse. What he saw confirmed his suspicions that Alvin used the tunnels underneath Berk to destroy most of the village. But knowing this only opened new doors for questions, the most important of which surrounded the Outcasts' exact whereabouts. Hiccup reasoned that the intact tunnels were the Outcasts' escape routes to a camp somewhere in the forest. He and Toothless ventured deeper into the tunnel until they arrived at an intersection.

Beside him, Toothless hissed.

"What is it, bud?"

Toothless' eyes were slits, and he was apprehensive about something that lay ahead in the tunnel to their right. Toothless fired. The shot hit the ground a few feet away from something, a very reptilian something that thrashed wildly.

"Toothless, you just made it mad!" Hiccup cried out, and had to pull on Toothless' saddle to stop the Night Fury. In the light that Toothless' fire generated, Hiccup saw the familiar hide of a Whispering Death. The worm-like dragon crawled and joined them in the

fork road. A large man was upon the dragon, which was clearly in distress following Toothless' bright fire.

"Ah, if it isn't 'iccup. I was 'oping you'd come."

There was no mistaking it. Hiccup would know that gruff voice and that big figure anywhere. "Alvin."

"How does it feel to have your village crumble before your eyes, 'iccup?"

"Why don't you tell me, Alvin?" Hiccup shot back, arms folded defiantly. "I didn't see how it happened."

"Oh? Shame," Alvin said in a mock sad tone. "No matter, I'm not done with Berk yet. I'm sure you'll see the second phase of my plan soon enough. I only hope you'll be there to see it and regret not joining me."

"I'll never betray Berk!"

"Oh, but you already did, when you taught that sheep-loving old man how to train dragons," Alvin answered, his teeth bared in a sinister smile. "Pity he didn't make it here. He would have loved to see the spectacle on your beloved academy!"

Hiccup could hold Toothless back no longer. Toothless lunged at the Whispering Death, but it was ready for the Night Fury. Alvin's dragon lashed with its tail and caught Toothless' back before the Night Fury could dodge. Hiccup lurched forward as Toothless slammed into the wall of the tunnel.

Hiccup was conscious enough to see Alvin's dragon clamping its mouth at the tunnel ceiling, and the earth shook all around them. The Whispering Death slinked back into the tunnel and left Hiccup and Toothless in the crumbling fork road.

"We can't let them destroy the academy!" Hiccup said. He and Toothless followed the Whispering Death's path. Hiccup flattened himself as best as he could while Toothless ran as swift as his short legs would carry him. As he ran, Toothless sent out a special roar that allowed him to get his bearings. Hiccup made a mental note to ask Evander about this ability; he can take care of that later. Hiccup heard the other dragon ahead of them. Night Furies were fast in the air and fast enough on land, but they were outmatched by a Whispering Death underground. Hiccup knew that Toothless couldn't catch up with it.

"Toothless, warning shot!" Toothless fired a small fireball that hit the Whispering Death's tail end. Hiccup heard the other dragon wail in pain, but it continued to traverse the tunnel upon its master's orders. A crumbling sound came from up ahead.

"Another one!" The next shot hit the wall of earth that zoomed up to meet them. The force of the fireball was strong enough to punch a hole that allowed Toothless to scurry through. "Good one, bud! I see light there. Alvin must have gone through that hole!"

He and Toothless reached the hole where a shaft of moonlight shone through. Toothless slowed down as they neared the patch of light.

Hiccup realized they were in a bad position. The Whispering Death had led them to an intersection where five tunnels met. Hiccup could hear the distinct sound that gave Whispering Deaths their fearsome reputation. Alvin had probably lured them to the Outcast camp, where Alvin's dragons were ready to pounce once Toothless came near enough.

He patted Toothless neck to get the dragon's attention. Sensing danger as well, Toothless halted, and looked back at Hiccup, who said, "Bud, we need to find another way out. Could you do that special roar thing you just did?"

Once more, Toothless opened his mouth and let out a distinctive roar. Hiccup braced himself as Toothless turned back and raced through a tunnel to their left. The eerie whispering behind them grew louder, and Hiccup hoped no Outcast would greet them as he saw light ahead. This time, Toothless didn't slow down, and Hiccup trusted his dragon's judgment. Toothless poked his head outside the hole.

The good news: they were in a forest clearing, and they saw no immediate signs of Alvin and the Outcasts.

The bad news: something dark and big was zooming towards them. It fired.

Toothless jumped out of the way just in time. The fireball detonated deep inside the tunnel. Several shafts of bright light illuminated the forest, indicating locations of tunnels. The forest was filled with cries of Whispering Deaths, which made the hair on Hiccup's nape stand on end.

The 'big dark something' landed lightly beside Toothless.

"You made it!" exclaimed Evander, who looked like someone lifted a Gronckle off him. Upon realizing his uncharacteristic exuberance, Evander stared into Scatty's jet black scales that gleamed under the moonlight. Could he admit that he, an elite rider of Nott and second-in-command in the frumentarii, found comfort in seeing an Outlander rider return safely to his homeland, when that was an established disadvantage for Nott? Shouldn't he be glad that one of Nott's rival towns was now nearly wiped from the map?

In his mind's eye, he saw his father's angry glare, and his mother's disappointed frown bearing down on him. But when he looked up again, he saw Hiccup's face which bore no jest, hate nor malice. The Outlander never did. It was no surprise that somewhere along the way, Evander had started to trust this Outlander called Hiccup.

Evander lurched; Scatty butted Toothless excitedly, and Toothless rumbled in return. When Hiccup raised an eyebrow, Evander rolled his eyes. "Don't mind her. She's probably venting to Toothless how annoying your flock of Terrors are. Those little gits stayed after the other dragons left Berk. So how did your end go?"

Hiccup gave Evander the short version of how Elene had chosen to help Berk in the hopes of finding her twin. Evander was speechless for a moment, and recovered to bring Hiccup up to speed. Hiccup was clearly distressed in finding that Astrid was hurt and poisoned.

"Gothi says she'll be fine," Evander assured him, conveniently

leaving out the part that he had administered a primary antidote. It was a special blend from the Nott healers, and Evander saw no need to tell Hiccup that. "But she'll be out for the rest of the battle. Scatty sensed Toothless on our way back, and here we are."

"No one followed you?" Hiccup asked. Evander shook his head. "Good. We need to find the Outcast camp and stop Alvin from demolishing the academy. It looks like he's gotten a few Whispering Deaths to do it."

An explosion from a hundred feet away dragged their minds back into the battle.

The two Night Furies took off immediately, and flew into the fray. Hiccup and Evander saw Khor rise up from the smoke with a number of dragons behind him. Scatty and Toothless followed them, and easily overtook the other dragons and their disgruntled Outcast riders in a climb. The Outcasts slipped and slid during flight, and they held on their dragons backs in the wrong places. One rider was strangling his Monstrous Nightmare by a four-limb grip. A blue-green Nadder was trying to buck off its rider, who was pulling at its head spikes. Hiccup didn't know which side he felt sorry for, the mistreated dragons or the clueless riders.

They passed by Hookfang and Meatlug, but their riders were nowhere to be seen. When Khor finally levelled and circled high above Berk, the herd behind him followed his lead. One rider slid off his Nightmare and landed on the bucking Nadder below.

"What's happening?" Hiccup asked Evander, whose face was surprisingly lit up with a smile. Scatty and Toothless flew side-by-side with Khor just in front. "Why are all these dragons suddenly following Khor? And why are you smiling?"

"It's Khor," Evander explained as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "He's dominated over the other dragons."

"He's like a Red Death?" Hiccup asked, horrified. But Evander didn't elaborate.

Elene risked a glance. She called back at them saying, "Evander, I need you to do a Janus (1) for those runts. Then you two go back for the prisoners at the camp. GO!"

Evander paled. He explained what a Janus was to Hiccup, who expressed the same distaste.

"So it's 'join us or else we send them to Valhalla'?"

"Or to the Underworld," Evander said, "but same difference."

Hiccup screwed up his face. "I won't do it."

Evander said nothing, but Hiccup knew that the Nottlander agreed wholeheartedly.

"We'll round them up and hand them over to my dad. He'll do the chiefting," Hiccup suggested. "But will your twin be all right up here?"

"Trust me, she will. I pity those newbies," Evander assured him, jerking his head back to the Outcast riders who were in varying degrees of irritation over their dragons. They both winced when one let out a stream of colorful swear words. "Time to go?"

"Right!" Hiccup nodded, and both boys flew to their side of the herd. It didn't take long for the Outcast riders to decide. Most of them chose to surrender, while two stubborn ones remained loyal to Alvin. A few moments later, Scatty and Toothless had plucked those riders off their dragons, who defected from the group and followed them.

When Evander and Hiccup landed at the arena, everyone was psyched up to fight. Stoick had the two prisoners of war locked in one of the dragon cages sooner than Hiccup could explain the situation. The renegade dragons, a Nadder and a Monstrous Nightmare, were quickly subdued by the Vikings with a help from Hiccup and Evander, and Gobber had them in separate cages as well. Several Vikings were to wait at the arena to receive the flock of dragons arriving with Khor and Elene, and Evander was making sure they'll be ready for the onslaught while Hiccup faced his father.

"So, now all we have to worry about are the ground and sea troops?" Stoick clarified.

"Don't forget Alvin and his dragon," Hiccup reminded him.

"That's one dragon against all of us. We can take them," Stoick said. The other Vikings murmured their agreement, and Stoick was more than ready to join them. But upon reading Hiccup's expression, Stoick stopped himself. Instead of dismissing his son, Stoick said, "Come on, out with it. Ye've got something else on yer mind, and I want to know if it concerns our tribe."

"Alvin has leverage over us, dad," Hiccup blurted out. "It's just him and a few stunned dragons that might come around at any minute and are more than ready to collapse what's left of Berk. Dad, I don't know how much Alvin can control them. I think he's biding his time somewhere underground, waiting for the best chance to strike. Probably."

Stoick stayed silent, contemplating. Hiccup waited with bated breath.

"I know Alvin, son. He won't attack unless he has people behind him. Take those people away, and he'll slink away like his treacherous title says he is. So that's what I'd like to do with those ruddy Outcasts who've taken the Great Hall. I'd like you to take your riders and look into this dragon problem and fix it."

"I won't let you down, dad," Hiccup said more bravely than what he thought he felt. Stoick put a hand on his son's shoulder. Hiccup nearly buckled under the force of Stoick's hand.

"Son, you know what happened the last time you fought a Whispering Death," Stoick told him quietly. "But if I could trust this mission to anybody else, I would rather ship myself off to Thor-knows-where. Don't lose another leg."

'Or any other body part,' Hiccup added in his thoughts.

Stoick nodded, and stomped off towards the other Vikings. Once the chief's back was turned, Hiccup released a breath he just realized he was holding. Once again, the village's survival was at stake, and Hiccup's father had entrusted a very important mission to him. It was not the first time Hiccup was in this position, but he still felt like he had swallowed a whole glass of yaknog. With a nudge from Toothless, Hiccup forced himself back to reality and began to plan. What he came up with was certainly not foolproof, but it was worth a shot.

He and Toothless passed by Gobber, who was sewing a Monstrous Nightmare's torn wing. They walked past a grieving rider shedding tears over a Gronckle with a spear sticking out of its mid-section. Finally, they joined Evander and Scatty by the entrance, where Ruff and Tuff were poking fun at the Nottlander's riding suit.

"Look how black and shiny it is!" Hiccup heard Ruff say.

"How come we never noticed it before?" Tuff was asking, and both twins made to stroke it. Evander shrunk back from them with a dark look. Hiccup stepped between them and shared his plan.

"That's crazy," Ruffnut said, banging her helmet against her twin.

"And stupid," added Tuffnut.

In unison, they leaned into Hiccup and shouted, "We like that!"

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All the Hooligans were motivated with the return of their chief, and they were motivated even more that the captured Hooligans were returned to them after their flock of Terrors launched a highly successful rescue mission on the Outcast camp under the leadership of Berk's pre-teens.

"We surrounded them," a wiry boy called Reginar was telling the Vikings, much to the gusto of his peers. "Gnak and I threw the fishâ€"

"Right in the ugly Outcast's face!" Gnak added.

"Then we released the Terrorsâ€" Yrsa exclaimed, throwing her Terrible Terror in the air.

"â€"and WHAM!" Reginar yelled, slamming his fist into a shield Gnak held. Gnak tumbled over and was lifted to his feet by his mother.

"Hel is served," Yrsa finished, a radiant smile gracing her round face. Her Terror licked her cheek affectionately and proceeded to nip the end of her braid. As Reginar continued to tell the tale of how he had instructed his other friends to release the captives, the other kids added on to his story in multiple degrees of enthusiasm. The flock of Terrible Terrors flew about excitedly, wondering what could make their human children so worked up. Evander had to take Scatty out of the arena to keep her from using the little dragons for target

practice.

When the children finished, Stoick and the rest of the veteran Vikings congratulated them heartily and sent them back to the refugee camp before marching off to take the Great Hall and the forest camp.

Their Viking fighting spirit leaked into the riders as well. With renewed determination, the riders and their dragons grabbed their equipment and flew into position. Hiccup was checking everything just in case, but he still felt something bad would happen. It was just his luck.

"Is everybody in position here?" Hiccup called as Toothless hovered over a tunnel where Ruff and Tuff were fighting over a length of rope. The cries of confirmation from the group of riders surrounding the tunnel greeted him.

"Uh, I have a question." Tuffnut held up the rope hanging limply from his hand. "We're really going to capture dragons with jaws that can chew rocks into dust using these?"

"And a couple of nets?" Ruff added as she yanked the rope from Tuff's grip, and the grappling hook dangled precariously beneath. Belch had to swerve out of harm's way.

Hiccup nodded. "Thank you for repeating that question. But yes, we are. Stay in position and wait for the signal. Then you'll have your go. Make it count!"

Hiccup and Toothless zoomed high above the forest where the Nottlander twins awaited them. They found Elene scowling at her brother, who was chuckling merrily. Elene had succeeded in herding the Outcast riders to the arena, and had them under quarantine, courtesy of the Berk Dragon Training Academy and associates. Hiccup left his Gobber in charge of the Outcast riders to distract his mentor from asking about the Nottlanders.

"Elene's still recovering," Evander said in amusement as Toothless flew beside Scatty. "Apparently the 'commander' is shocked that you guys managed to train other dragon species. I hate to say this, but I told her so!"

"I hope this plan of yours works, Outlander," Elene said, ignoring Evander's teases and surprising Hiccup with her less-than-venomous tone as Khor flew easily beside Toothless. "It's not what I had in mind, but it's a good plan."

"Which is the best thing you have to say for an Outlander, isn't it?" Evander taunted his sister. Then he turned to Hiccup before she could retort. "Are you ready?"

Hiccup squared his shoulders and stared back. "No."

And they scattered to set up their counterattack.

â€|

****Author's Note:**** Beta work by Ckelst. What did you think of the chapter? Like it or hate it? Tell me why in a review! ConCrit is

appreciated.

(1) Janus - In Roman mythology, he is considered as the god of transitions and is depicted as having two heads.

In the next chapter, we'll see how well Hiccup's counterattack will go, and whether or not anybody will lose a body part.

8. Chapter 8 - Broken

****A.N.:**** In lieu of the two-month gap between the updates, here is a short recap for those who have previously followed this story.

Despite the dragon riders reducing the Outcasts who reached the village, the Outcasts succeed in bringing down Berk from its rocky foundations by collapsing tunnels dug by Whispering Deaths. The Hooligans regroup at the Dragon Training Academy, and tend to their injured, including Astrid, who needed to be taken to Gothi. Elene intercepted and joined Stoick and Hiccup on their way to back to Berk. Upon their return, Stoick rallied and led the Hooligans against the Outcasts who have taken over the Great Hall while Hiccup came up with a plan to counterattack Alvin and his dragons. How will it all end?

* * *

><p>Breathing in deeply the chilly night air of Berk was not the wisest thing Hiccup could have done at high altitude. The cold seeped in and stayed in his lungs, heartless and foreboding, like the darkness that enveloped him and Toothless. Hiccup could barely see, but he trusted Toothless. No other dragon could see and fly better in the dark, especially for this mission.<p>

"Come on, bud!" Hiccup urged his Night Fury. Toothless' ear flaps twitched, as if sensing the other Night Furies, each forty feet away and marking their own flight pattern. Zeroing in on the hole below, Toothless dove. In those few seconds, the world shrank into just Hiccup and Toothless. All that mattered was that they get the right speed, the right firepower and the right position at the right time. Toothless didn't disappoint.

At the climax of the dive, all three Night Furies fired. They pulled out of the dive and up to safety just in time to witness the bright columns of light coming from the tunnels all over Berk, followed by the distressed shrieks of the worm-like dragons that slithered out of the ground.

The Whispering Death nearest Hiccup and Toothless had escaped from the net. Hiccup could hear the disgruntled cries of the Vikings below. Two Nadders joined Toothless up in the sky, with the riders holding a net aloft. By the light of Night Fury fire, Hiccup made out a Gronckle buzzing behind them, its rider twirling a rope with several metal helmets tied at the end.

When the Whispering Death saw them and attacked, Toothless and Hiccup led it to a short chase leading to the other Berk riders. The Night Fury swerved out of the way as the helmets zoomed past them and into the Whispering Death's mouth. The Nadder riders threw the net and

tangled the wings of the Whispering Death. Disoriented by the brightness of Night Fury fire, and now more agonized by the metal caught in its rows of teeth, it thrashed about wildly as the three Berk riders flew back to the arena where the cages awaited the captive dragons.

"Good work, bud!" Hiccup cried out, patting his dragon's head. Toothless grunted.

They circled the forest once and landed on a cliff.

"Hiccup!" Hiccup turned about sharply. He felt the gust of wind and the light footfalls of a Night Fury landing on the ground. From his perch on Scathach's back, the Nottlander was visibly animated, and his dark hair almost crackled with excess energy. Hiccup wished he could feel the same way. "I should stay here awhile; I really never get this much fun at Nott!"

"Don't let Elene hear you say that," Hiccup said, allowing himself a small smile. "Where is she anyway?"

A second ago, all three Night Furies and their riders were together.

"With Khor," Evander answered, glancing around nervously as though his twin would pop out of the shadows. "They'll be staying under the cover of the dark until we can work this situation out."

Hiccup nodded. "We should probably get back and help those captured dragons settle in."

They all landed by the academy, where two captured dragons were waiting to be hauled inside by Ruff and Tuff's group. The young boys dismounted and walked over to help the dragon keepers with their charges. It was hard work handling the Whispering Deaths. Once a muzzle was clamped over the mouth, the keepers had to drag them over to their respective cages. More than once, Toothless and Scatty had to stun a Whispering Death before it was hauled into its cage.

Toothless and Hiccup were taking a moment to rest, or rather they should have. But Hiccup was restless. Somewhere on the other side of the village, his dad was leading the Hooligans to reclaim the Great Hall from the Outcasts that had taken in earlier. Hiccup wanted to help, but his mission wasn't done. Not yet. Even as he scanned the starry sky, Hiccup knew that Alvin was out there.

The cages were brimming with no less than ten Whispering Deaths by the time Fishlegs' and Snotlout's group brought in two more dragons.

"I've got this, Hiccup," Snotlout told him, failing to keep the sneer out of his face. He grabbed a muzzle from an approaching Viking.

"You sure?" Hiccup asked suspiciously.

"Of course, I'm sure, Hiccup!" Snotlout said, brandishing the muzzle. As he said it, the Whispering Death broke free of the net and set its spines ready. Toothless pounced upon its back, and Scatty sent a

flare right at the captured dragon's eyes. Stunned, the Whispering Death fell to the ground. Evander snatched the muzzle from Snotlout and, with Hiccup's help, they quickly fastened it around the rogue dragon's mouth.

"You've got it, all right," Evander said scathingly.

"You took the muzzle out of my hands!" Snotlout protested. "How am I supposed to clamp its jaw shut when I don't have anything to clamp it with?"

Hiccup stepped between them. "Okay! Snotlout, why don't you put this dragon in its cage?"

But the cages were fully occupied. Snotlout and Fishlegs weren't happy about dragon-sitting again, but they set about the task when the Hooligans strapped down the two writhing dragons on the ground with ropes. Snotlout promptly left Fishlegs behind with some lame excuse about looking for a Fireworm friend of Hookfang's.

"What are you going to do with them?" Evander asked, leaning casually against Scatty. Hiccup, didn't answer and chose to stare pitifully at the restrained dragons.

Fishlegs, who was passing by in search for a Meatlug rock snack, chuckled. "Oh! Well, you know, there might be an eighty-seven percent chance of Hiccup wanting to let them stay on Berk to study them. And I'll add a forty-three percent chance of Hiccup wanting to train them."

Evander sprang up from his recline. "You're not that mad, are you, Hiccup?"

Again, Hiccup didn't answer. Instead, his green eyes brightened. What better way to turn the enemy's offense into something useful?

"Oh, I should have known. You are mad enough," Evander sighed, seeing the look on Hiccup's face.

"Yeah, mad enough to shoot down a Night Fury, befriend it and help it fly again!" Fishlegs chirped in. As he walked away, he called back, "No! Point ninety-six probability!"

"Hey, aren't you supposed to be watching over thoseâ€" And once again, he doesn't listen to me. He'll be back." Shrugging, Hiccup turned back to Evander. "We haven't found Alvin yet. I feel like there's something I'm missing."

Truth be told, fatigue was catching up with Hiccup and Evander. The action was over for now, and Evander shook himself hard to rid himself of sleepiness. With Hiccup's second recovering with the healer and Hiccup turning to him, what else should Evander do?

"Let's do a recap. We're hunting an Outcast named Alvin, who has probably has nothing but a few weapons, and the clothes on his back."

"He has his dragon," Hiccup added. They both whistled. A dragon and its rider could do many unpredictable things.

"To hunt them down," Evander said, "we've got to think like Alvin."

Hiccup looked positively affronted. Evander snickered, but continued, "Alvin's done what I think he needs to do. I doubt he lacks the quality of leaving behind his men when they're of no use to him. He's crippled Berk already, what reason has he to stay?"

"He hasn't driven off my tribe with only the clothes on their backs. I won't allow him to," said the Viking who had, together with his dragon partner, defeated the Red Death.

"All right," Evander said, pleased with Hiccup's sudden drive. Hiccup was going in the right direction, and all Evander had to do was prod him to it. "Then I suggest we go look for him instead of letting him come to us. Alvin set up a forest camp, right? Why do you think they stayed there and didn't attack the village? Was there something, or rather, were there a few people of importance there?"

Hiccup's shoulders drooped. "You think Alvin's going for the children and elders as hostages?"

At that moment, the Zippleback that perched on top of the academy lit its gas. Scatty and Toothless both jumped up and tensed, and their riders leaped to their saddles. Hiccup scanned the skies as if Alvin might pop up any second, which the Outcast did.

Well, the spines of the Outcast's dragon showed up first. Toothless and Scatty both leapt aside as a volley of spines hit the ground where they stood mere seconds before. Then Hiccup saw him: Alvin hunched over his dragon, zooming towards them and away from a pursuer that Hiccup couldn't see in the dark.

When he did, Hiccup snorted in disbelief. It seemed almost comical that a bulky man astride a worm-like dragon was trying to escape from a Night Fury and a young girl screaming bloody murder.

Hiccup would have taken a moment to laugh, but the sound died from his throat. The Whispering Death changed course and plunged down towards him and Toothless. Underneath Hiccup, Toothless went rigid. Hiccup's head snapped back when Toothless launched himself on Alvin's dragon.

Evander and Scatty would have followed had they not found another Night Fury blocking their path.

"That treacherous Outcast decided to go for the refugees," Elene said contemptuously, wiping sweat from her brow. Her lips twisted in a lopsided grimace. "A Nadder and a couple of Terrors held them off until Khor and I arrived. We saw a Night Fury bite mark on that dragon. This is an old vengeance. Stay out of it."

They watched as the Whispering Death knocked Toothless and Hiccup into the wall of the academy. Scatty growled and grew more agitated.

"You're right, Scatty. Come on," Evander said, bracing himself.

"I ordered you to stay out of this fight!" Elene repeated, moving

Khor to block Scatty's path. The Night Furies snarled at one another, lips curled up to show their sharp teeth. Elene glowered at her twin, as if daring him to argue. Their staring match was broken when Alvin's dragon sent a volley of spines that released two of its kin from detainment. Hookfang and Meatlug flew off in alarm.

"You're telling me we're leaving Hiccup and Toothless alone? Against them?" Evander balled his fists. Above them, Toothless was doing crazy aerial stunts trying to shake off the other two Whispering Deaths and to fend off Alvin's attacks. Toothless wasn't winning. Elene sighed and put a hand on Khor's head. Khor stood aside and rumbled, but the young boy just grinned. "We'll be back in no time. Trust me."

Elene reached out and grabbed Evander's forearm. "That's what you said before we got separated."

Hiccup and Toothless crash landed in a heap twenty feet away, digging a five-foot long grove in earth.

Finally, Elene straightened up on Khor's reassuring back and she watched her brother lead his Night Fury to cover Hiccup and Toothless.

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Toothless and Hiccup were recovering from a daze. Hiccup barely registered Alvin's dragon readying to shoot at them, and Toothless was in worse shape, having taken the brunt of the impact to protect his rider. Three Whispering Deaths had surrounded them.

From behind the assailants, Khor fired a warning shot that shooed one Whispering Death away and throw off the other's aim. But Alvin's dragon followed its rider's order: "Fire!"

The Whispering Death opened its mouthâ€”

A dark blur collided roughly with Alvin's dragon, throwing the Outcast off its back. The stray shot charred the wall five feet away from Hiccup and Toothless.

"Thanks," Hiccup yelled when he saw Evander and Scatty standing over them. The Nottlanders answered by leaping over the other Whispering Death when it lunged. Scatty tackled it to the ground. Evander ducked as the spiked body of the Whispering Death swept past where his head had been.

The distraction allowed Alvin to resume his mount. Hiccup saw Alvin's dragon readying another volley upon its master's orders. "Look out!"

Yet another dark blur lashed out. Khor pounced and pushed down on the Whispering Death's head as the Night Fury took off. Toothless and Scatty followed Khor's lead once more. They flew away from the island, past the sea stacks and out to sea. Alvin and the Whispering Deaths followed them.

Hiccup flicked his left foot, as Toothless followed Khor in a tight vertical helical climb, confusing the Whispering Deaths below. Every slip in flight path or tilt of the nose was done by the three Night

Furies in perfect synchronization.

Hiccup was beside himself in awe. "Whoa, Toothless, whaâ€"how are you guys doing that?" But Toothless concentrated on flying. Hiccup turned towards the Nottlanders and met Elene's gaze.

She yelled, "Now!" Elene pulled on her saddle, and both Hiccup and Evander mimicked her.

Khor started to break the helix. A good twenty feet away, Toothless and Scatty did the same, widening the gap between the three of them. Three night Furies simultaneously arched back and allowed gravity to claim them in a controlled nose dive right into the threesome below.

Flanked by two of its brethren, Alvin's dragon came to meet them. Alvin ordered it to fire a shot. When it did, two of the Night Furies pulled sharply out of the steep dive. The air currents dispelled the shot, showering the dragons and rider below with specks of lava.

Alvin somehow got through using his now scorched shield. The dragon to his right got a handful of the hot fluid on the eyes and fell towards the sea writhing and screeching in pain.

As Hiccup and Toothless circled back, Hiccup watched the injured dragon fall and felt his own spirits do the same.

'One down,' he thought darkly. In his mind's eye swam a vivid memory of Toothless shrieking his shock and pain to Valhalla. That same dragon slapped his rider with an ear flap to wrench Hiccup's attention back to reality. Hiccup flicked Toothless' fin, and they put on a burst of speed to deal with the two other adversaries.

Hiccup made out Elene's form flattened on Khor's back. Her Night Fury hurtled straight towards Alvin and his dragon; a bold but risky move. Hiccup thought Khor and Alvin's dragon were going to crash into each other but at the last second, Khor tilted his nose and reached out to snatch the Outcast.

Alvin was saved from the Night Fury's claws when the other Whispering Death tackled the Nottlanders head on. Khor ended up knocking Alvin off the Whispering Death's back with his tail while he and the offending dragon fought mid-air. The wrestling pair disappeared in the night soon after.

"No!" Evander cried out somewhere on Hiccup's left. An eye blink later, they too were lost in the dark.

This left Hiccup and Toothless against Alvin and his Whispering Death. The burly figure of Alvin hung on to the dragon for dear life. The Whispering Death was not used to being grabbed by the tail. It roared and flailed madly in an attempt to rid itself of the unwelcome attachment, but Alvin refused to let go.

"We've got to get Alvin off that dragon," Hiccup urged Toothless to complete Khor's unfinished business. Toothless narrowed his eyes, deciding on a flight pattern. Hiccup, on instinct, tilted the prosthetic fin as they entered a tight turn. Toothless fired a

warning shot, momentarily freezing the Whispering Death. Hiccup leaned forward as Toothless homed in and turned sharply to fly away.

"HICCUP! I demand that you let me go!" Alvin roared from somewhere behind Hiccup.

"You got him!" Hiccup leaned over the side to see Alvin dangling off Toothless' hind leg by his belt. Could it be? Alvin was within their clutches and very much at Hiccup's mercy! Hiccup had to fight off the strong desire to have Toothless drop Alvin to the icy waters below and let the Outcast responsible for the destruction drown.

Toothless rumbled, distracting Hiccup. The Night Fury flapped hard to stay in the air with an extra four hundred pounds. He climbed upward and levelled off as a round of fire passed harmlessly below, or rather, harmfully for Alvin, who was streaming a bunch of colorful swear words aimed for dragons. Now it wasn't only Hiccup who wanted to drop the Outcast.

"Okay, we've got more company!" Hiccup yelled. "Let's get back to the academy!"

And then another shot passed above Hiccup's head as Toothless dove towards the sea. Hiccup pulled out of the dive and let Toothless zoom over the sea, through the sea stacks and into the harbor. They ignored the indignant and colorful swearing from their unwilling, and now drenched passenger.

"Did we lose it?" Hiccup wondered out loud when they flapped over the ruins of the village, past the Great Hall, and onto the academy. No Whispering Death pursued them, much to Hiccup's relief. They were safe for now.

Hiccup and Toothless were welcomed with tumultuous applause and war cries from the villagers. A band of furious Hooligans closed in on their newest captive and dragged Alvin away none too gently.

"Wait!" Hiccup yelled, leaping down from his mount and attempting to catch up to his fellow Hooligans. "Where are you taking him?"

Gobber made his way to Hiccup and patted the boy's shoulder. "Off to yer father, o' course!"

All traces of fatigue vanished. Hiccup's face was lit up with the first big smile he's had for this dismal week. "Theyâ€"they won?"

"Yeah," a voice agreed. Toothless warbled, and joyfully bounded towards Scatty, who welcomed him with equal enthusiasm. A few feet away, Evander stood at the entrance of the academy, glowering at the Outcast that had disappeared within the throng of Hooligans who were carting the prisoner off. When Hiccup noticed the Nottlander's expression, Evander rearranged his features and smiled. "We all did."

â€|

After what seemed like an eternity, the sun rose, and with it rose the spirits of the Hooligans still shouting their victory and

praising Thor for favoring them in a dismal situation. As their chieftain put it, "The village is destroyed, the wild dragons have gone and left us, but Berk looks great!" Yes, their village was in ruins but their Viking spirit remained intact and very much alive. Unbeknownst to the celebrating Vikings, a lonely soul wandered among them.

Elene found her twin among the other Berk teens. They were listening to a burly Viking teen talking animatedly and miming what he supposedly did to an Outcast he'd defeated, while the red Nightmare looked on with vague interest. One of the Berk twins asked a question. It must have been funny, because the girl leaning against Hiccup started to laugh, and so did everyone else, including Evander.

They were laughing! Why were they laughing so hard, like the Outcast attack never happened?

From this perspective, good relations with these Outlanders weren't so bad. The idea seemed nice, compared to what had been drilled into Nott toddlers since their schooling days. These Outlanders weren't as vindictive and as power-hungry as she was taught to believe. And they even treated other species of dragons well! She really had been wrong to leave her twin behind without even seeing the other side of the coin. And she felt horrible about doing it.

What was with her today? She was thinking blasphemous thoughts that wouldn't have crossed her mind a week ago, when they planned out the patrol schedule. She even walked in broad daylight in an Outlander village! Perhaps she should wait until Evander wanted to find her?

Elene started to walk away. But Hiccup saw her and tapped Evander's shoulder. Her twin turned slowly, and locked eyes with her. Suddenly, Elene felt like she was plunged into a storm with Khor again. Would he hate her for leaving him behind? Did he still consider her as his twin, or even family? Would he set these battle-ready Berk teens against her?

Her twin faced her squarely, and sprinted towards her. Elene braced herself, ready for the plunge.

It took several eye blinks for Elene to realize that her brother embraced her tightly. They heard the burly one and the other set of twins make retching noises. The other three laughed quietly. But as for Evander and Elene, they couldn't care less. They had each other, and their family. That was more than enough.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that. I shouldn't have pushed you away back at Outcast Island, I shouldn't have judged you," she muttered into her brother's shoulder. "I'm so sorry."

"Thanks for coming for me, sis," Evander said, tightening his embrace. Then as suddenly as they hugged, Evander let his twin go. He held her at arms' length. "Don't disappear like that again."

A radiant smile spread across Elene's face. She couldn't have hoped for a better reunion.

"Maybe I will," she answered. When Evander glared at her, she rubbed

his hair and added, "once in a while."

"You are hopeless." Evander sighed in relief. He had his sister back, and they had helped defend Berk against the Outcasts. He couldn't ask for a better outcome. But there was something that nagged him still. "What made you come here?"

Elene's eyes wandered to the ruins of the village. "I caused all this. When I was shot down at Outcast Island, Alvin thought I was a spy for Berk, and decided that it was high time to eliminate this village. Khor and I decided we didn't want that hanging on our conscience."

Evander ruffled his twin's singed hair affectionately, to Elene's displeasure. "I knew you had it in you! Go on, I know there's something else."

Elene scowled at him. "And Iâ€¦ I wanted to make sure my second-in command is alive."

A thoughtful look crossed Evander's tired face. "That'sâ€¦ uh, nice to hear."

"Don't be flattered. As opposed to facing a bunch of Whispering Deaths, the thought of Augustus taking your place is frightening in itself."

The first semblance of laughter escaped the two Nottlanders in the midst of the weary but relieved Hooligans around them. Elene gasped sharply, clutching her side. She waved off her brother's concern.

"Not a wound, just a bruise," she assured him. Her eyes wandered over to the forest where she came from. "Butâ€¦"

Evander waited. When Elene remained silent, Evander decided to ask the hundred-denarii question. "Where's Khor?"

This time, Elene fidgeted uncomfortably.

"You see," she tried to say, but her voice cracked. She turned and distanced herself from the Berk teens. She didn't want to break down in front of them. Evander rubbed his twin's back to relax her and whistled calming tunes that Alva taught him.

After several deep breaths, she said in the tiniest voice only Evander could hear, "Khorâ€¦ heâ€¦ he broke his wing."

There was a sharp intake of breath beside her. A broken wing meant faulty flying, meaning immediate dismissal from service. Evander would know, would understand, more than anyone on Berk, even on Nott.

"Heâ€¦ can't fly anymore, Evander."

"Elene," Evander murmured gently. He supported her when her knees buckled and she cried hard into his shoulder. For that one moment, it was just the two of them. In other circumstances, he would have let her sob for as long as she wanted, but it was not the time for that. There would be time for tears later. Khor needed medical attention,

and to do that, Evander needed to coax a few details from his sister.

"Listen," Evander said, "Khor is your Night Fury. He's irreplaceable. You're bonded to him as much as he is to you. That hasn't changed, and it never will. I know what our village tradition says, but those traditions are just that! Traditions!"

"I know that! Justâ€¦ it's hard to accept. We'll be dismissed from the legion, at the very least. Khor and I are grounded forever. Here on this Outlander village! Augustus will get his wish after all."

Evander was about to say that he wouldn't mind staying on Berk to help the newbie riders. But he stopped himself when an idea popped inside his head. Evander prayed to all the gods he knew that this would work. "Where is Khor staying?"

"He's moping in a cave. Why do you ask?"

Evander glanced at Hiccup, who stood respectfully out of earshot with the other teens. "I think you might need a little Outlander help."

â€¦

"Are you ready, Toothless? The other Night Fury you freed is just inside that cave."

Hiccup and his dragon followed Elene inside, leaving Evander and Scatty just outside with the others. Elene called for Khor steadily. It took several tries, but slowly, Khor edged into the light. The Night Fury looked droopy. It dragged itself towards Elene with its head hung low and its tail trailed on the sooty ground. The left wing hung loosely on its side, while its torn right wing was bent at an odd angle.

Elene heard the boy behind her gasp, and Toothless rumbled in surprise. She wanted to cry so badly, but Evander had made her promise not to. She had to be strong for Khor. So she tried small talk and forced a smile on her face. "Khor... I haven't seen you like this since Zeph stole your breakfast. But you're looking much better!"

Khor shot her an incredulous look. Nevertheless, he let Elene rub his head and soothe him. He moaned, and it was one of the saddest things Hiccup ever heard. Khor kept dragging himself back into the shadows, trying not to be in view of the others who were there.

"It's likeâ€¦ he's ashamed," Hiccup realized. Toothless caught his drift immediately. The dragon nudged Hiccup gently, as if asking for permission. Hiccup nodded. "Toothless, show him your tail!"

Elene hadn't noticed it before, Toothless' prosthetic tail fin AND Hiccup's metal leg. All she saw was the Night Fury and the Outlander. She hadn't realized this partnership was not just strengthened by friendship between dragon and rider, but also by that unspoken truth that neither can fly as high without the other. But it was, and still is. She breathed out, "A matching impairment."

Hiccup shrugged. "I don't see it as an impairment anymore."

Toothless visibly agreed. He inched tentatively towards Khor, who hissed. Toothless purred softly and brought his tail up. Khor sniffed it, and eyed Toothless warily. Toothless glanced at his prosthetic fin, then at Hiccup. Khor followed Toothless' gaze, and sniffed Hiccup.

"What do you say, Khor?" Hiccup asked. "Think you'd be up for a wing brace?"

â€|

Entry 52

By the three heads of Cerberus!

I ended up spending a long week for Berk with the Hooligans, who have surprisingly trained dragons, helped me find my sister, and successfully defended against an Outcast attackâ€" even if the whole village got destroyed. But hey, the baddies are defeated and we're all alive. That's more than enough of a blessing, don't you think?

â€|

This was Berk.

No, it still is, only now it also boasts of a magnificent maze of dragon tunnels where most of the village used to be.

Seeing your home wiped out by misguided dragons felt like the time I lost my tribe, my father and my best friend in one go, or like the time I woke up to find a wood and metal contraption where my lower left leg should be: really horrible. Rather than blaming others and saying "should have's," we Hooligans chose to fight together and rebuild Berk. MUCH better than whining. And oh, we don't whine. Why should we? We're Vikings.

* * *

><p>A.N.: Beta work by Ckelst. Aaaaaaand that's a wrap. This chapter officially ends the first story arc. Finally! The next chapter will be both a filler and a prologue for the second story arc.

End
file.